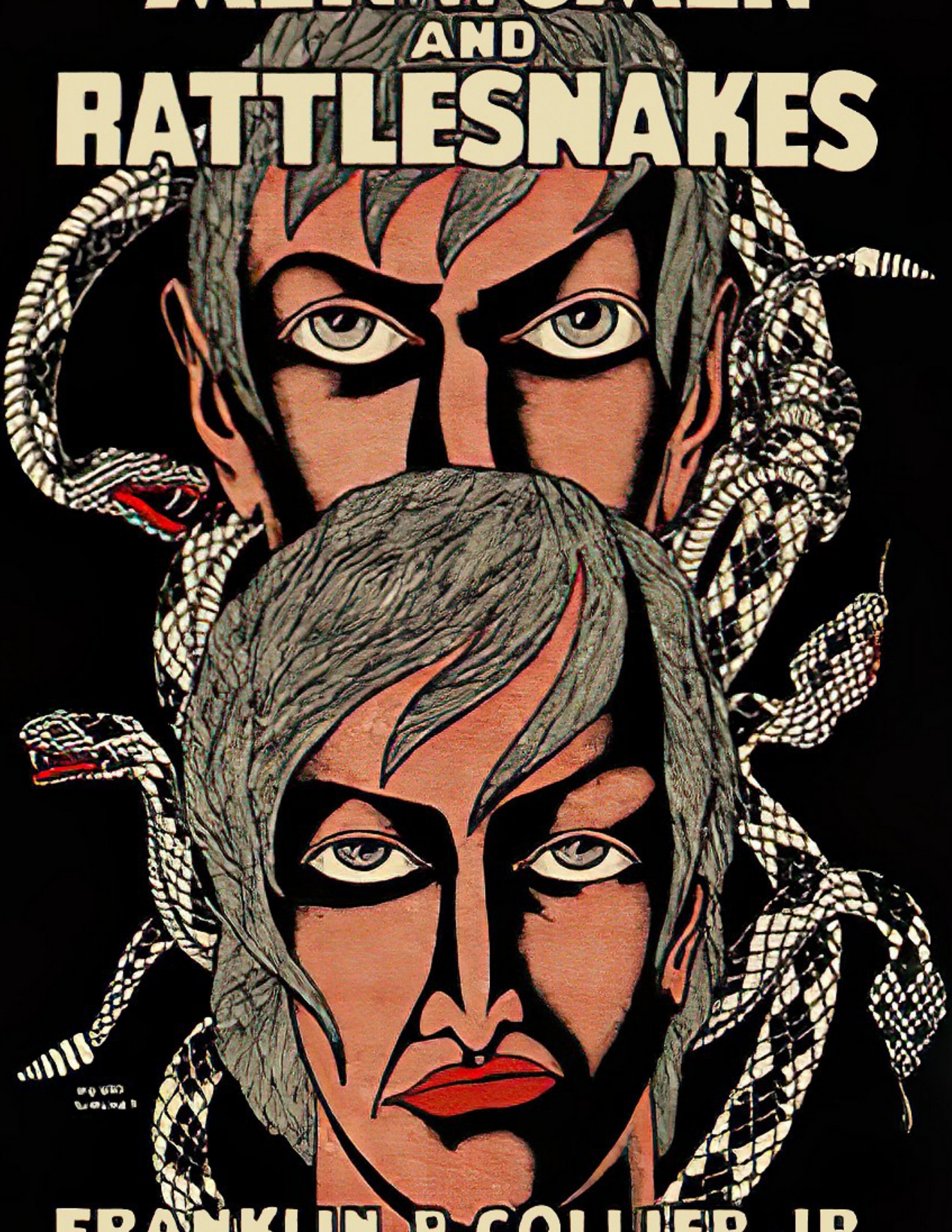
THE MOST EVIL BOOK EVER WRITTEN

MEN, WOMEN AND RATTLESNAKES



FRANKLIN P. COLLIER JR.

MEN, WOMEN, AND RATTLESNAKES

A Novel

BY FRANKLIN P. COLLIER, JR.

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CHAPTER I

A MEETING OF THE WOMEN-SEEKERS' CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

"THERE are millions! of drunkards in the gutters of Menham tonight!" Deacon Ira Ormsby, the speaker, waved his right arm above his head and clutched the table before him with his left hand. He had been shrieking against the evils of alcohol for over half an hour. The small audience of farmers still listened with sober faces. Most of them were still wondering when Deacon Ormsby was going to take off his hat. His loud voice held their attention, too. Its echoes about the walls of the miniature town hall brought a noisy relief from the monotonous quiet of their country life.

This delay in their Saturday night drinking activities did not disturb them. They could soon catch up to their customary pace for any hour in question at Lem Witherbee's saloon by making the opening drinks longer and with shorter intermissions. And being forced to catch up to schedule in this manner was generally preferable to the customary slower start, as past experience had shown that such a beginning frequently resulted in a night of more intensified drinking.

1

"Millions!"

Deacon Ormsby repeated his charge that the gutters of Menham stretched far into the sky with piles of drunkards whose affairs of the evening had come to a sudden end. He hesitated for a moment to let the effect of his words attain its full significance.

The comment was somewhat inaccurate. To begin with, there were no gutters in the town of Menham. Sidewalks and roads there were one and the same. When it rained there was more water and mud in the centers of these lanes than on the edges. Another fact the deacon had overlooked was that the population was well below three hundred, and that the total number of former residents and visitors for all time did not approach even one million.

The deacon probably would have disputed the fact that there was not enough liquor in the surrounding county to enable millions of men to enjoy the beds offered by gutters. He might have replied: One drop, yes, even one smell of this foul poison is enough to send an upright man to the gutter a drunkard and disciple of the Devil! One bottle of the demon rum can send millions to the gutter!

There were no remarks. The thundering tones of Deacon Ormsby were of more than sufficient noise to make their truth remain undisputed. The farmers were under

the spell of the noise. The words spoken did not make their impression as things of comprehensible meanings. There was a tense moment when Deacon Ormsby wiped his forehead during the pause.

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The audience thought the expected climax of the removing of his hat was about to occur.

Bulges in Deacon Ormsby's coat that draped awkwardly over his hip pockets suggested the presence of two pint bottles. His continued clutching of the table in a manner that made a third leg of his arm suggested that perhaps the bottles were not full. These details were taken for granted rather than observed by the spectators. None of them ever gave speeches when sober. They supposed it was the same with other people.

Deacon Ormsby being a visitor, they hoped he would set up drinks for the crowd over at Lem Witherbee's after the lecture. Lem Witherbee, who had closed his shop to attend the meeting, anticipated increased business. He expected a new customer in Deacon Ormsby and was certain the enthusiasm inspired by his words would lead to additional sales for the evening.

Deacon Ormsby belched with a loud report that was in keeping with his vocal tones and continued his address.

"Alcohol means death! corruption! insanity! wickedness! immorality! lewdness! rapery! murder! depravity! sodomy! lust! *pederasty!* cannibalism! crime! failure! Hell! disease! debauchery! the gutter! and the sink of iniquity!" he observed.

"He who acquires a taste for rum must have a taste for sewage. There is sewage in the gutters as well as drunkards. If the temptation to drink of

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liquor is ever upon you, remember! your next drink will be of sewage!

"Which of you gentlemen is the owner of this white horse coming down the aisle? Please remove him at once. At once, I say! He is walking on his hind legs and carrying a pitchfork! Take him away! He is chasing me! Help!"

Deacon Ormsby released his grip on the table and tried to run, shrieking in screams that were even louder than his speech. He staggered back and forth across the platform with one arm curled around his head.

The farmers watched curiously. They could not see the white horse that was chasing Deacon Ormsby with a pitchfork but were not concerned with this detail. The words "white horse" had brought that brand of whisky to their minds and the hope that the deacon would order it in buying the first round of drinks. They preferred an allegorical rather than a literal interpretation of the speaker's words and actions. Previously they had represented fireworks and excitement. Now they stood for White Horse Whisky and good times.

Deacon Ormsby dashed for the rear of the stage, stumbled, tripped, and fell headlong through a window that reached to the floor. But this was an anticlimax. He had snatched his hat from his head and thrown it at the wall just before the crash.

CHAPTER II

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND IS HIS WHISKY GLASS

LEM WITHERBEE'S saloon was part of his general store. One counter was cleared of other merchandise on Saturday nights and covered with an assortment of glasses, tumblers, and cups. Each man kept his own drinking utensil there, identified by its individual size, shape, and cracks. A few of the containers had initials painted on their sides similar to those on the shaving mugs in the barber shop at the adjoining town of "Westham.

John Lyman used a shaving mug decorated with ugly flowers and the large gold initials J. L. for his drinking. This had been a present from his wife, Anna, one Christmas. She thought it had been assigned a private niche at the Westham Barber Shop and had no suspicions that it was the most admired drinking cup in the Witherbee collection.

While Lem Witherbee kept a reserve supply of glasses of his own for use by visitors and in case any of the regular customers broke theirs, there was seldom any call for them. Each farmer held a sentimental affection for his chalice and took every precaution that its life should be prolonged indefinitely. These containers held memories and knew many secrets. They spoke with an intimacy that

brought words and thoughts to mind in ways no human being could do. Their breaking brought more sadness to the owner than a death in his family. A broken glass would still be used and cherished if enough of it remained to hold a drink of whisky.

Making acquaintance with a new glass after the loss of one that had been a friend through the years was like picking up conversation with a sullen stranger and forcing him to fill the role of confessor.

None of Lem Witherbee's customers ever had any lack of a drinking companion when he found himself alone at the counter. Each man's glass furnished the best drinking companion he knew, and if the stay was extended the conversation became oral as well as psychic.

Sometimes, after a long tarriance, a solitary drinker requested that cups of his best human friends be placed on the counter and gave messages to them which it was understood would be delivered to the owners on their next visit. Often at such times conversations were held with dead friends after their glasses had been returned to the counter with proper tenderness and care. The ritual of downing a drink of whisky

from the glass of the departed was usually observed during these latter conversations.

As custodian of the private drinking receptacles Lem Witherbee exercised all possible concern and caution in their handling. He kept them in carefully arranged order on covered shelves beneath the drinking counter, hidden from all eyes when not in use. He only moved them when placing them either

on the counter or back in their allotted places on the shelves. The containers were never washed. The unnecessary risk of breakage involved in this procedure made it unanimously forbidden.

Whisky of the cheapest brand was the regulation drink at Lem Witherbee's. Occasionally rum was substituted, such as at times when Lem ran out of whisky. The liquor was taken straight without recourse to chasers.

The anticipated round of White Horse Whisky to be purchased by Deacon Ira Ormsby had not been provided. His disappearance from the platform of the town hall had caused concern for this reason only. The men had accompanied Lem Witherbee to his store without thinking to look for the deacon beneath the window through which he had fallen. If he had been waiting for them at the store they would have been reconciled. Since he was not there, it was concluded that he had taken this means of escape from his social duties, and there was a feeling of resentment.

At nine-thirty the farmers were abreast of the usual drinking schedule for that hour. Andrew Cline was talking about cows. David Hume spoke of babies. Arthur Moore discussed women. A figure came through the door unnoticed and stopped on the outskirts of the group.

"I hear Miss Hummer is goin' to have a baby," said Alfred Dole casually. This was a stock joke that somebody always gave in some version every Saturday night. Miss Hummer was an elderly, prim virgin

of pointed joints who always turned out the light before undressing for bed. In the morning she dressed in a closet. It was generally believed that she had never undressed to the point of nakedness but always wore some of her underclothes beneath her nightdress. In keeping with this theory, it was understood that she had never taken a bath.

"I wonder if it will be twins," Dole continued.

His trend of thought was interrupted by Lem Witherbee who suddenly said in a loud voice, "Evenin', Miss Hummer."

Dole had heard no-one enter and would have taken this remark to be a joke if the reply, "Evenin'!" had not resounded in a high-pitched voice almost in his ear. Miss Hummer was standing directly behind his chair.

Silence immediately interrupted all conversations that had been in progress with a hush like that preceding an explosion. Dole did not move. He wished he could vanish through a window in the same way Deacon Ormsby had done, but he was hemmed in by chairs, walls of shelves, and Miss Hummer.

The impossible had happened. The austere Miss Hummer had penetrated this drinking temple of men. By unwritten law Lem Witherbee's store was for men only on Saturday nights. Women always made their purchases at other times. Miss Hummer usually would not even walk past the store at any time of the day or night on a Saturday." Nobody would have been any more surprised if she had stood before them now naked.

The group resented Miss Hummer's presence, and her untimely arrival at the moment of Alfred Dole's comment about her expected baby was resented even more. Dole was the only man who could be the object of her wrath, but the sympathy of the others was deep, for any one of them might just as easily have been the victim.

Miss Hummer spoke again. Her words provided more than the anticipated explosion.

"How did you know I was goin' to have a baby?" she asked.

Nobody could have spoken even if they had been able to think of anything to say.

"I was tryin' to keep it a secret," continued Miss Hummer. "I knew rum made men see double, but I didn't know they thought double, too. The baby will not be twins, and I expect the child tomorrow. Now is there anything else I can set you right on?"

David Hume frowned. This announcement meant an end of the jokes that had been built around the tradition of Miss Hummer's exaggerated virginity.

"Why aren't you in bed?" asked Andrew Cline.

Miss Hummer shrieked.

"I knew rum was a demon, but I didn't realize it could be as bad as this," she shouted. "How can you accuse me of being an abandoned woman? This child will be delivered to me from the Scofield Orphanage. I am adopting it!"

Miss Hummer burst into tears and ran out of the store, having forgotten all about the vital purchases she had braved this den of iniquity to make. The

thought that anyone could believe she was to give birth to a child without a ring on her left hand to prove the magic word of a clergyman had been spoken was too terrible for her comprehension.

"I didn't mean nawthin' 'ceptin' that it was way past her bedtime," said Cline, roiling for the first time that evening.

“She got almost as jumpy as the deacon when he mentioned ”White Horse Whisky,” said Alfred Dole. “Maybe she thought we expected her to give us all a baby.”

Witherbee poured drinks for all.

“We should have gutters here in Menham,” commented Andrew Cline.

“Yes, the deacon said we ought to sleep in gutters when we drink,” said David Hume. “Here in Menham we have to go home to bed.”

“Ormsby prob’ly got disgusted and went to Westham to find a gutter,” remarked Arthur Moore.

CHAPTER III

THE MALE CONSPIRACY FOR WICKEDNESS

MISS HUMMER took a dislike to her adopted baby as soon as it was delivered. After all, someone had given birth to it, and a stranger might assume it was she. Her visit to Lem Witherbee's saloon — vile sty of filth — had shown her that even the local residents were capable of believing she had committed a sin so foul, so contemptible, so low, so vicious, so criminal as to bring forth a smiling cherub.

Until then Miss Hummer had never thought it possible that any one could ever doubt her charity. Her virginity had become a thing so precious, sacred, and holy that she had even been able to convince herself that she still possessed an unruptured hymen.

Andrew Cline's suggestion that she ought to stay in bed the night before giving birth to a baby had brought back a forbidden memory and an agony of shame. She recalled the day when she was a little girl that she had broken her virginal membrane with a candle. The men had known about the baby. Perhaps they knew about this incident, and perhaps their version of her broken maidenhead was as distorted as their conception of the origin of the adopted child.

Men! — they had never been able to drag her from the path of virtue (none had ever tried very hard), but in their filthy mind they could rape her over and over again. Miss Hummer thought she felt herself shudder at the thought. Her body might be chaste, but her name and effigy could be corrupted constantly in men's societies of iniquity.

Miss Hummer had been further outraged by receiving a boy baby from the orphanage. She had insisted on a girl and had told the superintendent she would not adopt a boy. The infant was given to her without a name, and she had assumed it was a girl until, with all innocence and modesty, she removed its clothes. What was the shock, horror, and infamy of her discovery that the sex was male!

As soon as she could collect her thoughts after wrapping the exposed nudity in a towel, she had decided to send the child back to the orphanage directly. Then she changed her mind and smiled. No. She would not send the child back. Instead of being in the dreaded power of a wicked man, as she had always feared, she now had a wicked man in her power. Anything of the male sex was wicked. She could dictate to this wicked man all his life and let him suffer for the wickedness the fellow members of his sex would like to have done to her. Perhaps she could keep him

ignorant of the male conspiracy for wickedness. At any rate, she could prevent his giving his life to that cause while she was alive.

This plan pleased Miss Hummer so much that she decided the sacrifice of being forced to undergo suspicion

of motherhood was not too high a price. She had intended to name the baby Henrietta. This very name would be a good means of starting her kidnaping of a man child away from the male coalition.

“Henrietta Hummer, how’s that?” she asked the the baby. “Or let’s make it still better: Henrietta Harriet Helen Hummer.”

Miss Hummer could not accustom herself to the distasteful duties that had to be performed while the boy was indecently exposed. She looked forward to the time when he could take his bath alone and attend to other toilet necessities without assistance. She gave him as few baths as possible and made a bed for him on the kitchen floor. No man could share her bed or bedroom.

One night she awoke horrified by the thought that Henrietta was crawling towards her bed. She bolted the door at once. After that she locked the door before undressing.

CHAPTER IV

DEFLORATION

MISS HUMMER'S adopted baby gave rise to many theories.

In the new line of jokes it inspired for Saturday nights at Lem Witherbee's saloon the child was never considered as of any other mother but the spinster. Many interesting stories were built around various imaginary fathers and their methods of seduction, or of Miss Hummer's seduction — some said rape — of them.

John Lyman stuck to the story that the man had been kidnaped and blindfolded by Miss Hummer. Others had more variable accounts. No attention was paid to the obvious facts supporting Miss Hummer's explanation of the child's delivery from the Scofield Orphanage, which she took care to emphasize on all possible occasions. These facts were inconsistent with the overbalancing and more pleasing facts of their imaginations.

The women of Menham accepted the facts with reluctance but still had their theories. Some said the baby was an illegitimate child of an illegitimate daughter Miss Hummer had had many years before. Others said it was a child an old lover of Miss Hummer had found on his doorstep after refusing to be

its legal father. Another version was that the baby was from a brothel Miss Hummer had been secretly conducting in Scofield.

One by one the women of Menham all called on Miss Hummer to see the child. Henrietta was, of course, fully clothed on these visits, and all agreed that she was a very cute and pretty baby girl. The name Henrietta Harriet Helen Hummer was heartily approved, and Miss Hummer was praised for her kindness and benevolence in adopting this poor helpless orphan.

Miss Hummer brushed the child off very carefully and placed it on a parlor chair when she saw the callers approach on these visits. At other times she went out of her way to pay it as little attention as possible. It crawled about the kitchen floor at random and sometimes became lost on journeys into other rooms. She especially liked to ignore Henrietta when he cried.

There were other times, generally at night, when Miss Hummer was especially attentive to the child. She held it in her arms, hugging it tightly and rubbing her face against its head. She had a man in her power. She was the master. He could not seduce her, but she had it in her power to seduce him. His whole life was in her hands. She could kill him, cripple him, torture him, do anything she liked to him.

She had outwitted the male conspiracy for wickedness. She could play the part of the demon now with one of its own members. Her long suppressed

sexual urges and maternal love had found an outlet in a disguise of hatred and possession. Miss Hummer's subconscious resentment of the male sex's ignoring of her had found revenge.

Miss Hummer became happier, more congenial, and better natured. She sometimes smiled when she saw a man, taking care to turn her head away first.

Coming home across David Hume's meadow one evening after a trip to the store Miss Hummer saw a shocking sight. Alice Goode, a young and pretty girl, was walking through the twilight hand in hand with Felix Dole, whose father had spread the news about the baby. They were heading for a pine grove that bordered the field.

Such a sight aroused all of Miss Hummer's indignation, scorn, and bitterness. Such flagrant immorality! Their bodies were already fused in an uncouth handclasp, and Felix was taking her to a dark pine grove where their actions would be unobserved!

Miss Hummer felt faint. Should she run and try to separate them or go to the home of Alice's parents With the sad news? She was afraid to follow the couple into the woods. Felix was a large youth and would be quite capable of overpowering her with his immoralities, too. She hastened toward the Goode farm.

Silas Goode was lighting his pipe at the well by the back door when Miss Hummer arrived. Forgetting for the moment that he was a man, she dashed up to him with the words, "Felix Dole just

dragged Alice into the woods there at Hume's meadow. Quick! There isn't a moment to lose."

"Glad to hear it," said the farmer, lowering a bucket into the well. "She's been wantin' Felix to go walkin' with her for a long time. She's prob'ly tickled to death that he finally asked her." Goode chuckled. "You say he dragged her into the woods? More likely 'twas she draggin' him in. How's your baby?"

Without waiting for an answer Goode started for the back door with a bucket of water, shouting for his wife, Emma, to tell her the good news of their daughter's conquest.

Miss Hummer was flabbergasted. Here was a father rejoicing at the defloration of his daughter, a man promoting the infamy of other men even when it ruined his own child. She waited to see Mrs. Goode's sorrow at the news. Her only comment was, "That's fine, but now I guess you'll have to help me churn the butter."

Miss Hummer went home in disgust, stopping to break off two birch sprigs alongside the road. Henrietta had crawled from his bed on the floor and was crying

in a dark corner that imprisoned him. She picked him up roughly. Here was one person — and a man, too — who would not rejoice at this disgraceful moral turpitude.

She placed him face down in her lap and proceeded to whip him with one of the pieces of birch. The thuds of the branch as it struck and the child's loud screams aroused a pleasant sensation that she had

never felt before. She made her blows harder and harder and found herself removing Henrietta's clothes to make the pain more intense. Miss Hummer had been smiling when she started the whipping. Soon she laughed out loud in the manner of one who is under the influence of liquor — or lust.

Once inside the confines of the pine grove Felix released Alice's hand. He talked about chores and a recent visit to Westham. Alice wished he would kiss her. Felix wished he could get up enough courage to take her hand again.

CHAPTER V

SOMNAMBULATING WITH AN UMBRELLA

MAY CLINE walked in her sleep. These peregrinations did not interest her father, Andrew, but were of much concern to her mother. Mrs. Susan Cline was always awakened when her daughter climbed out of bed at night. She could never tell whether May was awake or not and did not dare speak for fear of awaking her if she were asleep. She firmly believed that waking a sleepwalker in action would result in insanity. She was not quite sure whether the crazed one would be the somnambulist or the one who woke him. The only way Mrs. Cline could tell whether or not May was noctambulating was to follow her.

May was seventeen years old and had black hair. When she walked during her slumbers she generally went outdoors. Her mother would precede her so as to open the doors in her path. In the winter Susan kept two overcoats at the foot of her bed, one for herself and one to throw over May's shoulders.

May had walked in her sleep since she was a small child. Only from the day of her sixteenth birthday had she taken to going outdoors on these wanderings. Since then she had left the house at night with regularity, usually on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Fridays,

and generally at the same hour: eleven o'clock. This schedule had become almost a ritual with May and Mrs. Cline. Susan used to look forward to her daughter's menses. During these periods she slept soundly and did not leave her bed.

May walked slowly as long as she was in the house. As soon as she was outside she would break into a run. Mrs. Cline did not dare to follow her at this pace in the darkness and so sat down — on the doorstep when it was warm, in the kitchen when it was cold — to await her return. When she came back May was always walking slowly.

After becoming addicted to outdoor sleepwalking and running, May had adopted a habit of putting on her shoes during cold weather before starting. This pleased Mrs. Cline, who had been afraid her daughter would catch pneumonia by going outdoors barefoot in the winter.

"The body knows how to take care of itself," she had said to her husband. "May is sound asleep when she walks at night, but now that there's frost in the ground she puts on her shoes."

"Maybe if you'd hide her shoes she'd stay in bed at night," Andrew had replied.

May was usually gone for about half an hour. At first this prolonged wandering had alarmed Mrs. Cline. She was afraid May would collide with something in the darkness and be awakened, or walk into the wrong house to find her bed — Arthur Moore lived alone in the nearest house to them — and be awakened in a somewhat different way.

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But after May had returned in safety a few times Susan decided that the extended scope of her nocturnal pilgrimages did not entail much additional danger. May seemed able to recognize her own house as well as her own bed when asleep. Perhaps she could detect obstacles in her path, too.

Sometimes Mrs. Cline saw pieces of hay in her daughter's hair after she got back. When snow was on the ground there were no footprints off the shoveled paths to the barn and road on mornings after. If it snowed after supper on the Sunday, Tuesday, or Friday walking nights, so that the paths were filled in, May generally stayed in bed, much to her mother's delight.

Susan had gone to the barn early one wintry Monday morning and noticed small cakes of snow clinging to rungs of the ladder leading to the hayloft. The snow had evidently been scraped from someone's shoes, quite likely those of May on her sleepwalking of the night before. Susan could imagine why May had climbed into the hayloft. Her body had become tired of walking and, since it was not yet time to return to bed, had gone into the soft hay to rest.

May Cline had a dislike for sewing during early childhood. When she was sixteen she took a liking to one form of sewing. Making pretty nightgowns and elaborating them with lace and designs of colored thread became a hobby. She always wore one of the prettiest nightgowns on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Fridays.

21

On rainy nights Mrs. Cline left an umbrella at the door. May opened it in the shelter of the small porch and held it overhead as she ran across the farmyard.

"Just imagine May usin' an umbrella when she's asleep," Susan said to her husband the morning after this had happened for the first time.

"Why does she bother goin' to bed at all?" Andrew replied.

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CHAPTER VI

A WORKING DAY FOR THE LYMAN WHISKY MUG

JOHN LYMAN was talking with the ugly flowers on his whisky mug. It was not Saturday night, but he had gone to Lem Witherbee's store after his wife, Anna, began to tell him at breakfast that he would have to stop drinking. His brother had died from overdoses of whisky, and the same thing would happen to him, she insisted, while John looked quietly into space and hoped one of the other farmers would have a similar excuse to make this day a holiday.

After John had gone, Anna became more cheerful and sang as she did her kitchen tasks. When these were finished she changed her dress and took a seat in the parlor. Anna enjoyed having a holiday during the week now and then. Besides, this was the day Peter Brush, the peddler, was due to visit Menham. She liked to be alone when he came. He was always very polite and businesslike, but some day it might be different.

She rocked in her chair and looked at the narrow black couch stuffed with horsehair. She would ask Peter Brush to come in and show his wares. Why couldn't he forget to bring his pack so that this formality could be dispensed with? Or he might leave

his load on the doorstep and come in alone. If he didn't have this pack he could pay more attention to her. Anna felt an envy for the peddler's pack. She could be very happy if Peter Brush carried her about the country instead of this load of goods.

John Lyman was the only drinker at Lem Witherbee's store. He had pulled up a chair to the counter at which liquor was sold and cleared a space there for his mug and a bottle of whisky among piles of boxes of all sizes, bolts of cloth, and trays of penny candy. Lem had made the clearing a little larger after placing Lyman's mug on the counter with a gesture that would have been motherly if he wore dresses.

An hour later John said to one of the distorted roses on his mug, "Yeah, I know, but don't you think Minnie ought to at least have gone into the barn with me to see what I wanted?"

There was silence while the flower replied in a voice discernible only to Lyman.

"Well, mebbee," he answered, "but seems like she might at least have said, 'No,' in a quiet voice. I ain't deaf. I didn't squeeze her arm very tight, and I showed her I didn't mean no harm by lettin' her go when she started to holler."

The flower seemed to agree with Lyman's point, for he smiled and nodded his head during the pause that followed.

“I’ll try that next time,” he said. “And I won’t let go if she starts to make a noise. I proved my

intentions are good. There’s no need to do any more provin’.”

Lem was waiting to make change when Lyman poured out another drink. Now that the spoken conversation with the whisky cup had started, he knew that John would be a customer for the rest of the day.

“Still thinkin’ about that Muller girl?” Witherbee asked by way of polite discourse. He had taken her mother, Nancy Muller, on many walks when she was a girl.

“Yeah, I was thinkin’ I might drop around and see her next time her mother’s away,” John replied.

John Lyman never noticed Minnie Muller when he was sober, but when he was drinking alone she always came into his thoughts as the first subject of the inspired conversation. Once he had gone to her house from the store when drunk. Minnie had been frightened by his greetings and ran away. She was a girl of many soft curves. Her mother had adopted the title Mrs. when Minnie was born.

Having shown a friendly interest in the subject at hand, Lem remained silent to leave John and his cup to their own thoughts. He sat down near John where he would be available if his opinions were wanted on any subject, and where he could watch the whisky bottle.

“Anna can always pick a good day for a holiday — ’course any day makes a good day for a holiday, but she has a way of makin’ ’em right now without any waitin’.”

Lyman had shifted his conversation to the gold letter J on his cup. Before he could reply to the initial’s comment on this introductory remark, he was interrupted by the entrance of Peter Brush, who immediately attracted all his attention by inviting him to have a drink. John drained his cup and placed it on the counter for the new drink with many thanks.

“I just been up your way,” said Peter. “Your wife said I’d find you here.”

“She buy anything?” asked John.

“No, she said she wished I wouldn’t bring so much stuff around when I came.”

“P’r’aps she’d rather you’d just come to call on her.” John Lyman laughed heartily.

Peter Brush gulped his drink.

CHAPTER VII

FIRE BELLS FOR RAIN

WHEN David Hume began his haying it was a sure sign of rain. Other farmers always waited until his crop had been spoiled before starting to cut their own. This year Hume had delayed the cutting of his hay. One morning he awoke to find that a corner of his meadow had been mowed during the night. It was raining heavily.

Arthur Moore was pleased by the drone of the rain that awakened him. A real service had been done to the countryside in starting Hume's haying for him. The annual three-day Hume storm had begun. After that it would be safe for others to do their haying. If Hume had continued to neglect his hay, the drought would have spoiled all the crops.

"Whoever cut that hay for Hume did him a favor," said Moore, winking at himself in his small mirror. "He'll get some hay of his own this year, and, with this rain, his other crops won't go bad."

The Hume storm called for a whisky conference at Lem Witherbee's store. Arthur Moore was the first to arrive. The news had spread slowly that the Hume haying had started during the night. Lem saw to it that the good news became known at once. He hurried to the town hall and pulled the bell rope.

This bell had been installed as a fire signal but was seldom used for this purpose. Nobody thought of fire when its peals were heard. The farmers hurried to the conference.

The conclusion of Andrew Cline satisfied the others as to the cause of the conference, "Since David wouldn't cut his own hay I s'pose the weather man had to come down and cut it for him so's he could give us this storm."

David Hume suspected one of the other farmers might have helped the weather man but only confided this to his whisky glass later in the day after the storm had been forgotten by the others.

Alice Goode did not approve of the storm. She had hoped to take a walk with Felix Dole that night. He never asked her to go walking, but they had a way of meeting at certain times and places and continuing along together.

Felix had discovered a knack of taking Alice's hand. He often found her hand in his at times when he thought he was still trying to get courage to take it. He always held her hand very gently, so gently that Alice sometimes had difficulty keeping it in his. He had not yet dared to kiss her.

Minnie Muller did not appreciate the rain either. This was her night to go walking with Paul Turner. Paul did not treat her hands so gently. In fact, he paid little attention to them. He worked for Andrew Cline and was very strong. Minnie enjoyed her walks with Paul. They did not walk far but were never home very early.

Paul would not even call on her tonight. Her mother would not approve of her going to see his aunt in Westham in the rain. This was the best excuse they had found for getting away alone. If Paul should sit down with them for an evening of talk he would soon fall asleep.

Miss Hummer was also displeased with the storm. At first she had found it quite to her liking. Henrietta had to have a bath, and the rain could give her much assistance.

She had undressed the baby and put it in a large pan she used for making soap. This she had placed in her back yard. Then she had run to the shelter of the kitchen, where she could watch the effects of the rain beating down on the child. Red stripes that crossed each other in no particular pattern stood out on Henrietta's body.

Miss Hummer smiled as she watched the baby in the rain. If she left him there long enough he would surely be clean. The smile did not last long. Henrietta had been crying when he was indoors. Soon after Miss Hummer left him out in the rain alone his cries stopped. He seemed to be enjoying the splashes of the raindrops. Henrietta began to smile and gurgle and Miss Hummer to frown. She waited several minutes. The rain continued to delight the baby.

Miss Hummer brought the child indoors to finish the bath herself. Henrietta was soon crying again.

CHAPTER VIII

HAYCOCKS AND HAYLOFTS

AFTER the Hume storm, haying began with justified optimism. There would be no more rain until the hay was safely in the barns. Even after David Hume cut the rest of his crop the sky would remain clear. Mrs. Cline put the umbrella that had been kept at the door for May to use at night back in the closet.

The whisky conference had been held for a very practical purpose of deciding upon a system of cooperation among the farmers. This subject had not been mentioned at Lem Witherbee's, but the morning after the storm the farmers met in a group at Andrew Cline's barn as though by appointment to start on the first field. The same haying schedule was followed each year, and its details called for no reiteration to the exclusion of more important topics at the conference.

Mrs. Emma Goode liked the haying season. It brought an atmosphere of excitement and a feeling that something was going to happen. This expected something never did happen, but each year Mrs. Goode had new nameless hopes that brought a pleasing anticipation and suspense. She was sure that if she was ever given a present of a million dollars or

found a fine carriage in the barn it would happen during haying days. Whatever happened of a pleasant nature during the haying season would be quite in keeping with her frame of mind.

Haying days were hard-working holidays. Irritating things did not happen at this time. They would not be tolerated and so went unnoticed. Even when Mayhew Currier had been killed one year by falling from a hayrack onto Arthur Moore's pitchfork the event called for no serious concern until the holiday spirit of the haying season was over. Mrs. Goode felt happy, for pain as well as rain was dismissed until the hay was in the barns.

She had liked to play among the haycock when a child. It was on a pile of hay that Arthur Moore had shown her many things she never knew before. Silas Goode had taken her to a pile of hay a few years later, and a few months after that Silas had married her.

Mrs. Goode looked at Alice, her daughter. Perhaps she would sit down to rest on a haycock this year. She wished she could change places with Alice for a few days. Silas was all right, but there was something nice about being taken to a haycock at night that he did not appreciate now. He had all he wanted of fresh air and haystacks during the day. At night he led the way to bed but not into the fields.

“You been seein’ quite a bit of Felix Dole lately, ain’t you?” Mrs. Goode asked Alice.

“We been walkin’ a few times, that’s all,” her

daughter answered. “I ain’t seen him since it rained.”

“Well, you better not go walkin’ with him so much. It don’t look good to be seein’ one boy all the time, and Felix ain’t a very good boy for you to be goin’ with anyway.”

Mrs. Goode smiled to herself. Things were supposed to be nicer when forbidden, and she certainly was not going to neglect her part in making Alice s meetings with Felix more enjoyable.

“Well, I won’t be able to see him now it’s hayin’ time,” said Alice. “He’ll be busy days and tired nights.”

Mrs. Goode had said, “That’s too bad,” before remembering she was reprimanding her daughter. “Your father didn’t used to be tired nights,” she added by way of encouragement.

Alice did not appreciate the holiday atmosphere with the same enthusiasm as her mother. She changed the subject and offered to go to the store for some needed groceries. Mrs. Goode gave her several coins from her pocketbook and, when her daughter had left, sat down in a reverie of haycocks with faces that smiled and winked at passing couples.

There was a knock on the door. Mrs. Goode opened it excitedly and found Arthur Moore standing outside. “And me wearing this old dress and spotted apron,” she thought, her excitement increasing.

She had not been alone with Arthur Moore for many years. This sudden reunion without onlookers

was a surprise indeed. It seemed as though he had just arrived back from a long journey. It was strange he should come to see her after she had been married all these years, but then, these were the haying holidays.

“What are you doin’ way over here?” she asked.

“I sprained my wrist and thought I’d come to call,” said Moore. “Silas won’t be home to dinner.”

“No, but Alice will.”

“Well, let’s talk it over in the barn. We can go out and see if the lofts are ready for the hay.”

Being led into a hayloft by day was not quite the same as visiting a haycock at night, but for the moment Mrs. Goode thought it was even nicer. She walked into the

barn with Arthur. The expected something that never happened in the haying season had happened.

Alice returned from the store running and without the purchases she had gone to make. Mrs. Goode was just coming out of the barn.

“Ma!” Alice shouted. “Pa’s been killed. He was killed just like Mayhew Currier was! He fell off Cline’s hayrack and landed on Arthur Moore’s pitchfork. And there’s Arthur Moore now!”

Arthur Moore had followed Mrs. Goode out of the barn.

“Oh, yes, I was goin’ to tell you,” he said. “Silas was fixin’ the hayrack, gettin’ it ready, and my fork was restin’ agin a wheel. The railin’ broke, and the tines went through him.”

Mrs. Goode forgot the holiday spirit of the haying season for a moment. She looked into space.

“Well, you tried to break the news gently,” she said to Arthur.

Arthur Moore was walking toward the road.

CHAPTER IX

A NOISY FUNERAL ENDS MERRILY

AFTER the haying was over, the populace of Menham turned out in a group for Silas Goode's burial. The body had been kept in Mrs. Goode's cellar, as cool a place as could be found, but the weather had been hot, and there was an unpleasant odor for those who stood too close to the casket.

The coffin had been made by Andrew Cline to whom the duty fell since the death had taken place on his farm. He had nailed up the body while Mrs. Goode waited at the top of the stairs. The smell in the cellar had been strong. The coffin, with open spaces between the boards, resembled a crate more than a casket. There was a lining of newspapers.

The burying had been delayed by the haying ceremonies, which could not be interrupted by anything but rain. Despite the assurance of fair weather after the Hume storm, haying was still done with all possible haste. A burial at night would have been inconvenient.

Lem Witherbee was the officiating sexton. He designated a spot that he thought was well to one side of Mortimer Goode, Silas' father, the last one to be buried in the Goode plot. Witherbee and Alfred

Dole dug there until Lem's pickax went through the end of a rotted wooden box.

Forgetting where he was, Lem thought that perhaps he had discovered buried treasure. He pulled off the broken board and saw a skull, which reminded him that he should have counted off nine paces from the gravestone instead of seven. But the hole was deep enough, so, after enlarging the bottom, the grave was declared ready.

After the group had assembled, the coffin was lowered into the hole by Andrew Cline, who brought it from Mrs. Goode's cellar, and Lem Witherbee. Miss Hummer had been one of the first to arrive and was enjoying herself immensely, although her dejected countenance was the most mournful in the gathering.

A man was dead. There was one less man to inflict himself on women. The male society for the promotion of wickedness could not coöperate with him any more. He was simmering in the flames of Hell now and adding his groans to the chorus of men there.

Miss Hummer stood as close to the grave as she dared. She smelled the stench from the coffin and almost smiled. A man could not conceal his true nature when dead. This awful odor which permeated his being was concealed during life, but in

death it became the perfume of his soul. Neither the smell nor the soul could hide within the body then.

John Lyman, being a cousin of Silas Goode, was to say a few words over the grave. He had written

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something on a small piece of paper and began to read, “Silas Goode was a fine farmer and was always good to his wife and child. He was free from sin and—” Lyman could not read his own writing. “He was born in 1872 and—” Lyman held the paper at a different angle to the light in an attempt to decipher the next word.

At this point there was a general surprise by the appearance of Deacon Ira Ormsby. On his last visit to Menham the deacon had been found asleep behind the town hall by Little Mary Dole while playing the morning after his temperance speech. He had stood up and walked away hatless without saying a word and had not been heard from since. The window that had been broken on his fall was still broken.

Deacon Ormsby was wearing a hat when he joined the funeral company. He walked through the group, stumbled, and turned back to face it from a spot directly in front of John Lyman. He began to talk in a very loud voice as though he had been an announced speaker whom Lyman had just introduced.

Lyman was pleased by this conclusion to his part in the program. Perhaps the deacon would buy the White Horse Whisky this time, and perhaps he, as Silas’ cousin, could have the drink that was due Silas. Being so close to Deacon Ormsby he could not help noticing large bulges in his hip pockets.

“It makes me very sad to come upon you in this hour of suffering and sorrow,” roared the deacon, “but I am only too pleased to be able to do my part in sending your lost” —he hesitated between the words

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“brother” and “sister” then said— “friend into the eternal happiness.”

“I knew and loved the deceased well,” —he hoped the corpse was not a woman — “so well that I can be one of you in your sorrow. I am sure our dead beloved is now enjoying the happiness of Eden, drinking the cup of bliss—”

Deacon Ormsby became entangled in the threads of his thoughts. “Drinking” and “cup” were cues for a different sort of discourse. He paused, belched, staggered slightly, pushed his hat back on his head, clenched his fist, and yelled, “Ladies and gentlemen, let us take this example of the evils of whisky — the terrors of alcohol. Death and the horrors of Hell await those who drink liquor. All the torments of Hell have been exceeded in the saloon. Far more men come out of saloons dead than escape alive. Dead, ladies and gentlemen. Death and whisky are synonymous. Whisky is poison, the worst poison the Devil has conceived. Death comes to those who drink whisky. Death, shame, degeneration, and Hell. Death.”

Deacon Ormsby paused abruptly. His threads of thought had untangled themselves and left him in an embarrassing position. He pushed his hat forward hastily and added in bellowing tones, “But this dead comrade is an example of an unsullied body, free from the poisons of whisky, plucked into Heaven by God’s own hand to be His bosom companion. Our dead friend is now conversing with God, telling

Him perhaps how he escaped the ruin of whisky and how—”

In his enthusiasm Deacon Ormsby swayed too far to one side, lost his balance, and took a quick step in an attempt to right himself. His foot came down in thin air. He found himself falling. He disappeared into the open grave.

CHAPTER X

DEACON ORMSBY BUYS THE DRINKS

EXCEPT on occasions of extreme necessity Deacon Ira Ormsby never bought whisky in the towns where he spoke. He made his tours of the countryside on foot, speaking at one town and drinking at the next. Unscheduled speeches were frequently given in the saloons of the latter towns, but these were inspired talks that God called upon him to make in these foul dens of iniquity where they could do the most good. His hip pocket supply made it possible for him to drink in towns where he gave formal lectures, even though he did not purchase liquor there.

To seem to violate his own precepts by drinking the very poison he assailed was an inconsistency that Deacon Ormsby could readily explain, and in such a loud voice that the skeptic could offer no further arguments that would be heard.

Whenever this question was brought up, whether facetiously by fellow drinkers or in earnest by indignant temperance fanatics, Deacon Ormsby would strain his exaggerated dignity to a new maximum reserved for such times — if he still had sufficient control of his bodily faculties. This increased dignity alone would often frighten the questioners and provide all

the explanation needed, but Deacon Ormsby would not let the doubters off so easily. He would assume an expression of pity, righteous indignation, and violated virtue all in one. Then would come the blast of noise that usually did not stop until the questioners had withdrawn for shelter.

“Such a question shows a mind unable to comprehend the sufferings of true martyrdom, the pains of Jesus Christ on the cross and of His companions on either side,” the deacon would say.

“I am a *martyr* to my cause. I have devoted my life to fighting whisky and saving the souls that it would otherwise lead to graves in the gutter. I drink this poison myself for this one purpose: so that others cannot have it. Poison that goes into my body cannot contaminate another’s. I drink to save others. I suffer the torments of whisky so that they shall escape. The more I drink the less there is left.

“God has granted me a special immunity from death by this poison but protects me from none of its pain. He has made me a martyr to show others what will happen to them if they succumb to whisky. By my example, when I sleep in the gutter all those who see me there are frightened into a life of temperance. Your question overwhelms me. It is unbelievable that my work could be unappreciated by even such a handful of skeptics.”

Deacon Ormsby could go on in this vein as long as he had a listener. Then he would sit down — if he had been able to stand beforehand. At any rate, he would have a drink.

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There were those who said Deacon Ormsby conducted his temperance campaign to prevent others from drinking liquor that might otherwise be his. The motto, “The less others drink the more there will be for me,” had been ascribed to him.

This defamation was equally easy for the deacon to answer. “There were those who ridiculed and persecuted Jesus Christ, too,” he would say. “As His messenger, I have been cast into jail and slandered by the unrighteous. This additional invective is only another burden for me to carry as a martyr to the cause of temperance.”

For various reasons, Deacon Ira Ormsby usually did not follow the same route twice or stay in any town more than one night. His return to Menham had been as unexpected to him as to the residents. He had thought he was on the road to Lakeville when he found himself at Silas Goode’s funeral in Menham. This was his day for drinking rather than speaking, but he could not resist the opportunity afforded by the already assembled funeral group.

Having spoken there, he could continue on to Lakeville without visiting the Menham saloon and make tomorrow his drinking day. This plan would have been feasible had it not been for the open grave. When Deacon Ormsby landed on the coffin he heard a cracking of breaking glass and felt wet. The lower part of his body was dripping, and a smell of whisky replaced the stench of the corpse when Lem Witherbee and John Lyman helped him out of the hole.

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His reserve supply of whisky was gone. He could not continue on to Lakeville in this condition. It would be necessary to visit Menham’s saloon and at once. Deacon Ormsby picked pieces of broken glass out of his hip pockets. He felt partly undressed without the padding of these two pint bottles.

“I could not leave without proving my nearness to our beloved dead friend,” he said, making no attempt to account for his wet trousers.

“What d’you do, strike a whisky well down there?” Andrew Cline whispered to Lem Witherbee, wishing the drops that were coming from Deacon Ormsby’s trousers could be dripping into a glass.

“No, but the deacon prob’ly wishes there was a whisky well handy,” Lem replied. “He didn’t get away this trip. He’ll have to come to the store now. And he sure gave Silas the drink that was comin’ to him.”

Deacon Ormsby walked out around the group to the road and continued on his way, while all the women except Miss Hummer applauded the uproar of his remarks. Even his fall into the grave had been taken as a symbolic expression of something

very sacred and appropriate. Only a few had laughed. The men had been watching for some such irregularity and were glad the grave had a bottom.

"Silas was lucky to have the deacon come along when he did," said Mrs. Dole to Mrs. Goode.

"Yes, but Silas prob'ly won't appreciate it," she answered. "He never cared much for show."

The men had no doubt but what Deacon Ormsby

was heading for Lem Witherbee's saloon. It had been closed for the funeral, and he would have to wait there to have the broken bottles replaced. Lem would be neglecting his self-imposed duties if he went back before the grave was filled in. He and Alfred Dole proceeded to shovel dirt onto the whisky-stained coffin with much haste, while the others urged them on to greater efforts.

Deacon Ormsby was sitting on the doorstep of the store asleep when the farmers came running up in a body. He was having a bad dream in which the storekeeper told him no liquor was sold there. When Lem Witherbee opened the door the deacon fell through it backwards and awoke. The farmers politely waited for him to get to his feet before entering, forming a wall around the door that prevented an escape in their direction.

"Is this Menham's foul den of iniquity where whisky can be purchased?" asked the deacon, shaking himself into a position of dignity.

"Yes, indeed," said Lem proudly.

"As a martyr to my cause, I am called upon to demonstrate what no man should ever do. Give me a glass of that horrible poison known as whisky."

"I ain't got no poison whisky, but I've got a nice bottle of White Horse," Lem replied.

"Any kind at all will do. Poison is poison under any label."

Lem Witherbee arranged the glasses of all those present in a row and opened a quart bottle of White

Horse whisky that had long been secluded in a dusty corner of his liquor shelf.

"Last time you were here, you know, you promised us a round of White Horse," said Andrew Cline meekly.

Deacon Ormsby was concentrating his attention too closely on the bottle in Lem's hand to pay any attention to the remark. He placed a bill on the counter with the words, "I must suffer the tortures of whisky to save the souls of others."

Lem seized the bill, and, starting at the opposite end of the counter from the deacon, poured a drink into all the glasses. The deacon drank his with the manner of a man dying of thirst who is given a thimbleful of water and called for another.

“Did I pay you for the first one?” he asked, fumbling in his pocket.

“Yes, just right,” replied Lem. “Is this next one goin’ to be for every one or just for you?”

“Just me, of course,” the deacon bellowed. “I would die before I would buy whisky for another.”

Lem poured the deacon’s drink and reached for a different bottle from which to serve the farmers. He was used to inconsistencies in his customers’ remarks, and, after all, the deacon had only promised one round of drinks.

CHAPTER XI

HENRIETTA HARRIET HELEN HUMMER'S FIRST TOY

SILAS GOODE'S whisky cup, a thick white mug with overlaying networks of cracks, was placed with proper dignity in the niche reserved for customers who could drink no more of Lem Witherbee's beverages.

This was an internment attended by sympathy and sentiment on the part of the farmers. Burial of the body was a routine duty— Silas had left that, and the corpse hardly resembled him. But putting his whisky cup on the shelf of the dead was a sad rite— Silas was still a part of the cup and could use it no more. The part of Silas that had been buried had escaped from further work. The part that still remained had been deprived of further pleasure.

This would happen to all of their cups some day. Perhaps they would have to watch the world from this niche to the end of time, owning a cup and unable to drink from it. Even when a friend used a glass on the reserved shelf in communicating a drunken message to the owner, only the living friend could drink the liquor.

Deacon Ira Ormsby's example was considered quite fitting for the occasion: drink all you can now because you can't use your whisky cup when you're

dead. The deacon had even interrupted the silence that came when Lem Witherbee placed Silas Goode's cup into its new sanctuary by calling for another drink.

"Do you s'pose Silas could taste whisky if we put some in his cup?" reflected David Hume.

"He could if he was here," said Arthur Moore, whereupon the subject shifted to horses.

Miss Hummer returned home from the funeral happy that another man was gone and unhappy that still another man had arrived to take his place and to be applauded. She plucked small birch branches from trees as she passed. She had quite a supply of these in her kitchen now, but it would never do to run short. She kept the switches in a pile beside the stove, where they would be mistaken for kindling by a visitor. She had a bouquet of long twigs as she entered her yard.

Henrietta was sleeping in his bed on the floor. He usually slept when Miss Hummer went out. She had left him crying and crawling on the floor. He had crawled to the bed somewhat like a tired kitten that has a box of rags in a corner. Miss Hummer wakened Henrietta at once. The baby remained on the bed as though waiting for another opportunity to take a nap.

Miss Hummer had found a large crib in her attic which she now kept in the parlor. She placed Henrietta there when she had a visitor. The baby had only slept in this crib once: when Mrs. Whiter had

made a long call during which the conversation turned from babies.

"I've got some nice new birch switches for you, Henrietta," said Miss Hummer pleasantly.

The baby began to cry.

"You'll cry louder than that when I use them." Miss Hummer struck the child across the chest. "How do you like that?" she asked.

The baby stopped crying but began again as soon as Miss Hummer left its side. She paid no more attention to the cries than though she had just wound a clock and left it ticking behind her.

It was a hot day. Miss Hummer wanted to take a nap, but if she did it would mean this man in her power could sleep, too. She didn't want Henrietta to escape the heat, but she supposed it was necessary to let him sleep a lot if she wanted to continue to keep him in her power. Well, she could make sleeping a little harder.

Henrietta was wearing a long dress and a variety of underclothes. Miss Hummer placed him in a chair and put another dress on over these garments. Now he could go out in the hot sun and sleep or cry, whichever he preferred. She left the baby on a stone step outside the kitchen door and went to her room to lie down.

She awoke during her nap resenting the fact that it is necessary to take such care with babies in order to keep them alive. Henrietta might have had sunstroke outdoors while she was asleep. It would be no great loss if he died, but if she wanted to have

a man in her power she would have to keep him alive. If he were dead now there was nothing she could do about it. Miss Hummer went to sleep again.

When Miss Hummer finally came back to the kitchen door the baby was not on the step nor in the yard beyond. She went around the corner of the house and saw Henrietta sitting in the shade of the woodshed. She saw something else, too, and was terrified. There was a large black snake in the baby's lap. Henrietta was playing with the snake and laughing, fingering its body and lifting its tail into the air. He shook the tail, and there was a noise like a rattle. The snake's head was on the baby's chest and moving nearer to his face, its tongue flickering in and out between two fangs like flashes of fire.

Miss Hummer had a horror of snakes. The sight of a snake came like an electric shock and left her nervous for a week or more. How did this awful monster get into her yard? How could she get rid of it? How could she prevent seeing it again? She ran back into the kitchen trembling and locked the door.

Then she thought of Henrietta. She shuddered, not out of concern for the baby but for herself. The male conspiracy for the promotion of wickedness was asserting itself. The man she had dominated was now dominating her. He held her at bay. She could not even approach him. He was torturing her worse than she had tortured him. The thought of the snake brought back the electric shock.

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Henrietta had been laughing like a fiend as he fondled the snake. Where had he learned to laugh? This writhing horror must be a messenger of the male conspiracy for wickedness. It had led him into the shade and taught him how to laugh. What other secrets had it brought? Perhaps it had told Henrietta his real sex and brought some poison with which he could kill her. The male depravity was even worse than she had imagined. And its secret powers were incredible.

Miss Hummer regretted that she had kept the child. She had asked for a girl. The delivery of a boy had been a mistake. The whole thing was probably part of a male conspiracy against her.

The snake might be outside the door now, waiting for her to open it. It would crawl all over her, rape her, while Henrietta beat her with the switches she had gathered to use on him, or perhaps with bigger sticks.

She sat still in terror. The male conspiracy must have inspired her to put Henrietta outdoors. This horrible suspense. What was going to happen to her? With an extreme effort of courage Miss Hummer forced herself to a window where she could see the Woodshed. She saw Henrietta and the snake still in conference. The snake's head was now curled around the baby's neck. She ran back to her chair.

At intervals of several minutes Miss Hummer bravely brought herself to the window again. Each time the snake and the baby were in new positions, and Miss Hummer felt new agonies.

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On the fifth trip to the window the snake was starting to crawl away. Miss Hummer giddily seized the curtain to hold herself there and saw the snake disappear through a small hole beneath the woodshed. She continued to stand there for several minutes until the baby began to crawl after the snake.

This roused her to action. She would not let the male coalition kidnap her baby while she stood idly by. She unlocked the door, ran to the child, picked him up, and dashed back into the house.

Henrietta seemed to be just the same as before. His strength had not increased, and he no longer laughed. Miss Hummer searched about his clothing for a vial of poison. There was none. This man was in her power again. She had thwarted the male society for the promotion of wickedness. She wished she had dared to kill the snake.

Miss Hummer hastily removed Henrietta’s clothes and proceeded to select the largest switch in the pile.

CHAPTER XII

DARKNESS FOR CLOTHING

IT was Tuesday and May Cline's night for sleepwalking. Mrs. Susan Cline, who had been keeping a record for twenty-eight days, decided that, although it was Tuesday, it was not May's night for sleepwalking. For this reason, she did not leave the umbrella at the door, even though it had looked like rain at bedtime.

Mrs. Cline slept soundly, expecting her daughter to do the same. She was not awakened when May sat up at eleven o'clock and put her feet on the floor. May remained in this position for many seconds, but her mother continued to snore. Without her mother to guide her in leading the way down, the dark hall and stairs to the door May anticipated some difficulty.

She considered waiting up her mother but was afraid that to do so would waken her father, too, and he had always been in favor of forcing his daughter to remain in bed when she started to walk at night. May started down the hall alone, helped by the side of the wall.

At the head of the stairs she groped for the railing and then started the descent timidly. Her mother had been of even more assistance than May had

realized. She collided with a chair in the kitchen and found herself barricaded by the kitchen table. Considerable fumbling freed her from this prison, then her thigh struck the door knob. She drew the bolt, turned the key and the knob, and was outdoors.

It was raining. May felt for the umbrella in its usual place, but it was not there. Why had her mother been so careless tonight? The pretty blue nightgown she was wearing for the first time would get all wet. She thought of leaving it in the kitchen and going on her way without this only garment, but perhaps her mother would be waiting there to lead the way back to bed when she returned. She took off the nightgown and placed it on a dry part of the porch. Her mother probably wouldn't come out in the rain, and a nightgown could be put on quickly and quietly.

Well, she knew her way now. May began to run, both from force of habit and because of the rain which struck her naked body with cold splashes. She entered the barn through a small door that was open and was greeted by the pressure of a man's body with his arms around her. She tried to kiss him, but in the darkness she could not find his lips, which she soon learned had been seeking her breasts.

There were no spoken words. The man took May's hand and led her to the rear of the barn, where the floor was piled high with the hay that had been left over after the

Cline lofts were filled with the new crop. In the darkness, all movements had to be felt and not seen.

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The horse stamped, and the two cows could be heard swinging their tails. In a sty underneath the stalls two pigs grunted occasionally. May did not notice these sounds, nor did her companion. The sense of hearing had fallen into disuse for the time being.

When May returned to the house she did not mind the rain. Its drops were cooling and felt nice. She walked slowly to enjoy them. Puddles and mud splashed about her bare feet and ankles, but even this seemed nice.

She was about to open the kitchen door when she remembered the discarded nightgown. She felt around for it indifferently, but was roused to a more careful search when her fingers touched nothing but wood. May fumbled about the porch again but only made her fingers dirtier. The nightgown had disappeared.

"I'll bet Ma's been out here," May concluded.

"Well, t'ain't my fault if the wind blows off my nightdress when I'm asleep."

She opened the door and entered the kitchen. Her mother was sitting at the table in the dark. Mrs. Cline started up the stairs followed by her daughter.

When she awoke the next morning May saw her blue nightgown at the foot of her bed and was somewhat worried. She did not get up until her parents were downstairs.

At the breakfast table Mrs. Cline said to May, "I like to broke my neck trippin' on a nightgown of

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yours on the back porch last night. I guess it blew off the clothesline."

"Yeah," said May, "I meant to take it in 'fore I went to bed."

"Musta been hangin' in mid-air," said Andrew Cline. "I took in the clothesline just 'fore supper."

This clinched the point for May. Mrs. Cline would not let the facts interfere when her husband disputed her. Once she had established a proposition it remained dogmatic regardless of what he might prove to the contrary.

"And I put it up ag'in just after supper," she answered.

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CHAPTER XIII

A SNAKE AND HIS WIFE BECOME PROPERTY OWNERS

THE power Miss Hummer exercised over a man was reciprocal after Henrietta's interview with the snake.

She held him a prisoner in her fortress, but he had communicated with the enemy and taken possession of her lands. Miss Hummer no longer dared go into her back yard or even to leave her house by the kitchen door for fear of meeting the black snake.

She kept the kitchen door locked and bolted. When she had to go out of the house she used the front door, which formerly had always been more of a decoration than a practical part of the dwelling. Going outdoors at all was a risk that was taken as seldom as possible. The snake could crawl around to the front yard and lie in wait for her.

Henrietta had become more than a potential member of the male coalition for the promotion of wickedness; he was now a full-fledged and active member. Miss Hummer saw to it that he was kept indoors and away from further contacts with things outside.

To have her property taken over by a snake was a horror that would have caused her uneasiness even in imagination. Miss Hummer was in continual fear

that the snake would find its way into the house. There was always the dread that it would be lurking under something she was about to touch, or curled up behind some object either directly ahead or behind her. when Miss Hummer undressed with the light out at night and went into her closet to dress in the morning, she could almost see the snake hiding in the darkness.

Several times Miss Hummer had looked out a window and seen the snake crawling about near the spot where it had been with Henrietta. Once she had seen it lying there motionless, evidently waiting for either her or the baby. On these occasions she had whipped Henrietta immediately to let the snake hear his screams.

Being barricaded like this caused many inconveniences. It kept Miss Hummer from going into her barn or woodshed. She had no animals to feed, but she did want to cook food for herself. Without Wood for the fire she could not do any cooking.

While Miss Hummer was imprisoned by the snake Mrs. Nancy Muller came to call for the first time since the baby had been adopted. Mrs. Muller was very deaf and, in common with the men of Menham, did not accept the story of Henrietta's adoption. It is doubtful if she had actually heard this story, but if she did she rejected

it as due to some new defect in her ear drums. She knew babies could be obtained in only one way, and she knew Miss Hummer had a baby.

Miss Hummer had been doing sentry duty at a

window overlooking the woodshed and did not hear Mrs. Muller until she began to pound on the back door. Was this the snake demanding entrance? Miss Hummer felt electric shocks running over her body.

She went to another window and saw Mrs. Muller's rounded shoulders. Only a visitor, and a woman, tool The relief was so great that she started to open the kitchen door. Then she reconsidered. She could not take any such chance as this. Mrs. Muller would have to come in by the front door. Miss Hummer went out the front door to call her there.

When Miss Hummer got her first full-length view of Mrs. Muller she thought she was going to faint. Mrs. Muller was holding one arm out in front of her on a level with her shoulders, and in her hand was the long black snake, which hung down to the ground. A woman was cooperating with the male conspiracy! Mrs. Muller had been ready to pounce upon her with the snake as soon as she opened the kitchen door. Miss Hummer was about to run back into the house and lock the front door when Mrs. Muller saw her.

"I just killed this rattler in your driveway," she said. "Thought you'd like to see it. Biggest one I've seen in a long time."

Killed? The snake was dead? It must be a trick of some kind.

"Put it down!" yelled Miss Hummer. "Don't bring it near me!"

Mrs. Muller was walking toward her to let her get a better look at the snake.

"Ain't he a big one?" she said proudly, while Miss Hummer ran for the door.

"You must be a'scared of snakes." Mrs. Muller threw the rattler to the ground and followed Miss Hummer to the door. "How's the baby?" she asked.

"Be sure and take that snake away when you go!"

"I know how it is," replied Mrs. Muller. "Havin' a baby and no husband. I've been through it all." She sat down in a parlor chair.

"Don't leave that snake out there when you go," said Miss Hummer, so distracted she did not realize this enemy was dead.

"Yes, and knowin' who the father is, seein' him every day, and him actin' like he'd never seen you before. I've been through it all."

Miss Hummer opened a drawer where she kept pencils and paper. She wrote in large letters, "Take the snake away when you go," and handed this message to Mrs. Muller.

"What would I want with it?" she replied. "I killed it, ain't that enough?"

Miss Hummer wrote another note, “Im afraid of snakes. Please put that one where I can’t see it.”

“Oh, all right,” replied Mrs. Muller. “But as I was sayin’, it’s irritatin’ when a man says he’ll marry you while you’re enjoyin’ yourself with him, and then when you have a baby he says it’s some one else’s. But p’raps it’s better not havin’ a husband around to bother you. Did you have a boy or a girl?”

“I adopted my baby, and it’s a girl,” said Miss Hummer, recovering most of her dignity.

“You’re lucky. I wish I’d had a boy. At least he can’t have a baby, and maybe he can be a little help when he grows up. All Minnie can do is wait for night to come so’s she can go walkin’ with Paul Turner. First thing I know *she’ll* be havin’ a baby. She’ll prob’ly want me to take care of it.”

Miss Hummer felt much better now. She was shocked rather than horrified. But she would have to set Mrs. Muller right on two important points. She wrote, “I adopted my baby and it’s a girl.”

“So you got a girl, too,” replied Mrs. Muller. “Too bad. We both got girls, and we both didn’t get husbands.” She laughed. “I know how it is. I’ve been through it all. Now you better change your name to Mrs. like I did. You’re the same as married if folks call you Mrs.”

Miss Hummer summoned her loudest voice, “It’s not my baby, I adopted it! Adopted it!”

“Yeah, mine hurt a lot, too,” Mrs. Muller answered.

Miss Hummer could not let Mrs. Muller continue to have this horrible opinion that she, a virgin and a benevolent foster mother, had given birth to a child. She wrote, “It’s not my baby. I got it from Scofield Orphanage.”

Mrs. Muller laughed when she read this. “I found mine growin’ on a tree,” she replied. “You better just change your name to Mrs.”

Miss Hummer was indignant. How could this

woman say such things? She wrote again, “But it’s true.”

“There, there, of course it’s true,” said Mrs. Muller. “Every baby has to have a mother. There’s no use tryin’ to deny where you got it when you find a baby in your belly. Only Christ’s mother could think up a story anyone would believe. And if she’d a been a virgin the baby would’a had a hard time gettin’ out.”

Miss Hummer’s exasperation and scorn became as intense as her horror had been previously. This callous infamy with which her character was being stained was more of the suffering she must go through to have a man in her power. This sacrifice

was too great. She was becoming a martyr. She would see that Henrietta was made to feel each of these cruel words as keenly as she had.

The argument came to an abrupt end when Mrs. Muller stood up with the remarks, “Babies are a nuisance. Well, you’ve learned your lesson now. Don’t have any more. I’ve got to be goin’. I’ll try to remember to call you Mrs. after this.”

She went out the front door, while Miss Hummer remained in her chair. Mrs. Muller picked up the snake and dragged it behind her out to the road.

The snake was dead now. Miss Hummer could get some wood for a fire and cook a meal. The enemy had been killed, the male coalition defeated again. Mrs. Muller had done her a great favor after all. She locked the front door and unlocked the kitchen door, pushing Henrietta out of her path with her foot.

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Miss Hummer walked toward the woodshed. She owned her yard again. Henrietta had no more power over her. Then she looked down. Directly in front of her was a live black rattlesnake, larger and longer than the other. Electric shocks that should have brought sparks surged through her.

Miss Hummer ran for the kitchen door. Mrs. Muller’s visit had been a ruse. She was part of the male conspiracy, one of its whores. She had taken the other snake home to have supper with her, to sleep with her.

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CHAPTER XIV

ARTHUR MOORE'S SNAKE STY

ARTHUR MOORE lived alone. His parents became ghosts, as he expressed it, when he was a boy, and his wife had died two days after he married her. He had a theory that neighbors at a distance were bad enough and numerous enough without having more and having them live in his house. He regarded matrimony as a gigantic swindle conducted by women. He would never be caught again.

He only had to see neighbors occasionally and usually on a friendly basis. He would have to see a family more often than his cows, whether on a friendly basis or not. It would probably be unfriendly. Besides, he didn't like to see people as often as he did his cows. There were plenty of women without bringing one home to support, and having her breed children that he couldn't be sure were his.

Arthur Moore gave very little thought to the breeding of children. They were the result of carelessness. There was a bounty on rattlesnakes. He preferred to breed them.

He had a pen of these snakes that he fed and tried to fatten. When they became too numerous for comfort in the quarters provided, he killed some of them

and collected the bounty. He had enlarged the pen several times.

The snakes were kept behind the barn, where they could bask in the sun. A wooden cover was let down over the wire netting top when there was a visitor. Callers saw only a large wooden box. Nobody but Arthur had ever seen the inside of this pen of snakes.

Arthur Moore liked snakes, especially rattlesnakes. He liked them for pets as well as for the bounty they brought. He found them the most affectionate of all animals. He often took two or three rattlers out of the pen and let them crawl over his shoulders and arms. They did not try to get away and never bit him. When one fell to the ground it often curled about his leg.

Sometimes he put the snakes to practical uses. He would take some of the largest and let them drag themselves about among his crops with their tails tied to long pieces of twine fastened to stakes. They would eat harmful insects without damaging the plants.

He usually waited until the crops were high enough to hide the snakes before employing them in this way. If any one did notice one of his fields of tethered snakes, Arthur would explain that he had set some snake traps and was waiting to get

some ammunition to shoot them. He didn't dare try to kill them any other way because they were poison.

Rattlesnakes were useful in another way, too. They would bite other people, and their bites often meant death. Nobody could accuse him of having

anything to do with somebody's being bitten.

When he took a strong dislike to a person Arthur Moore enjoyed leaving one or two big rattlers near that person's house while walking by at night. If they happened to bite anyone, he would agree that it was too bad. If they didn't, or if the wrong person was bitten, he could take another walk by the house at night. If the dislike he felt was strong enough he could bring more than one or two snakes.

Arthur Moore regretted the loss of two favorite black snakes that had escaped from their tethers in his potato field. They had been fine snakes, and, no doubt, would like to be back in the pen. They were the only black ones he had. Perhaps they had been stolen. He had been saving them to use when he had a real enemy, some one whose funeral he really wanted to attend. If two other snakes had come loose from their leashes it would not have been so bad, but these were special favorites. They would have won first prizes if there were snake shows.

Arthur had looked all over the potato patch and adjoining field without success. He gave the other snakes a meal of live toads and frogs and went to call on Mrs. Goode. Perhaps the lost snakes had crawled onto her property.

He had visited Emma many times since Silas Goode's death. He usually took her walking, as he had when she was a little girl. He had to keep her out of sight of her parents in those childhood days. Now he felt that he had to keep her out of sight of Alice.

CHAPTER XV

A SECRET SEXUAL PLEASURE

ONE day when Arthur Moore was a young man he had decided to marry. Marriage was a mystery that many people indulged in, and his curiosity as to why they did so got the better of him. There must be something more to marrying a girl than having sexual intercourse, he thought. It was not necessary to get married to enjoy this pleasure. There must be other pleasures, other bodily contacts that could be revealed or performed by a girl only after she had married a man.

Having made this decision, Arthur began to consider the possibilities in the way of girls. There was Nancy Muller — she was Miss then — but he had had too much trouble convincing her to stop and lie down when they took walks together. There had been one night when she would not do anything but walk.

If she was as contrary as this in accepting such pleasant sensations, she was probably just as stubborn in other ways. She might refuse to eat — but that would not worry him — or she might refuse to reveal the new pleasures that marriage permitted.

There was Jenny Taylor. She had not been contrary when they had gone on walks. She would be a nice girl to enjoy any sort of pleasure with. Arthur

felt that he was making improper advances in asking her to marry him. He was suggesting a new form of intercourse whose nature he did not know but which she did know. She might consider it an insult.

He waited until they returned from their walk that evening before proposing. If she considered his proposition indecent and refused to have anything more to do with him, at least he had enjoyed a final evening with her. To his great surprise, Jenny kissed Arthur when he asked her to marry him.

They went to Scofield the next Sunday to have the ceremony performed. Arthur had harnessed his horse to the carriage at daybreak so to get an early start and be back that night. Jenny was happier than he had ever seen her before. The marriage-pleasure must be an intense sensation if its anticipation had this effect on his bride.

Arthur had never gone anywhere with Jenny by daylight before. She kept an arm around him and kissed him frequently, which annoyed him. Why was it necessary to get the permission of a minister to obtain this new pleasure? Such a formality seemed ridiculous. But so many others had done the same thing before him that there must be some good reason for it. Perhaps the minister sold some contraption which was necessary for the full enjoyment and which could only be used by one couple.

The Scofield minister did not sell Arthur anything but his marriage certificate. “Is this all we get?” Moore had asked with the feeling of a man who has paid for a house and been given a paperweight

model of one. The wedding had been so meaningless and nonsensical that he thought the clergyman was lying when he said they were now man and wife.

“He must be too lazy to marry us right,” Arthur thought when the minister assured him that was all.

Jenny seemed willing to believe it was all over and tugged at his sleeve to come away. If she was ready to show him the new pleasure, that was all he wanted, but it seemed a pity that they had needed to waste a whole day just to hear and say these few words and get this piece of paper. He felt that someone had played a joke on him. Why couldn’t Jenny have come alone?

Arthur watched Jenny carefully as they got into the carriage. How soon would she show him the new pleasure? Should he stop as soon as they were out of sight of the houses of Scofield? He drove the horse at a gallop until there was nothing to see but trees.

“Shall we stop here?” Arthur asked.

“If you will, please,” Jenny answered.

Arthur started to follow her into the woods, but she laughed and said, “You use the other side.”

Arthur got back into the carriage. He had used the toilet at the minister’s house. Evidently Jenny did not want to show him the new sensation yet. Driving on to Menham, whenever they passed through a particularly dense stretch of woods, he asked if she wanted to stop. She only laughed and said, “No.”

Arthur became irritated and indignant. Why was

she keeping him waiting? They were married now — or at least so the minister had said. He was entitled to know what marriage was. The minister should have let them use a room of his long enough for this initiation. There should be no more delay or suspense. Jenny only talked nonsense and seemed to have no intention of letting him know what she had in store for him until they got home.

Arthur’s rage and desire increased as the ride continued. At last he pulled the horse to a stop alongside a field. There was one pleasure of which Jenny did not have exclusive knowledge. He could at least enjoy her in the ordinary way he always had when they went walking, and it was no longer necessary to hide. He stepped from the carriage.

“Come on,” he said to Jenny, starting to walk toward the field.

“What for?”

“You know what for. Come on.”

Jenny followed him. She was his wife now. They did not have to wait for darkness. As soon as they were off the narrow road, Arthur placed her on the ground and started to fumble with her petticoats.

“We’re married; I can do that myself now,” said Jenny.

CHAPTER XVI

ARTHUR MOORE IMPROVES ON BEATING ONE'S WIFE

WHEN they drove on, Arthur Moore did not feel so much concerned with the new pleasure of marriage. He could wait until they got to Menham to know about that. He pulled up in his yard more interested in food than his wife's body. Jenny had brought a lunch which had been eaten — most of it by Arthur — before they reached Scofield.

The bride prepared supper, which the groom ate hastily. When Jenny started to clear off the table Arthur interfered by holding her wrist.

"You can do that in the morning," he said. "It's bedtime now, and you've got a lot of things to show me."

"But it's still light," Jenny protested.

Arthur led her to his bedroom without comment.

"I didn't bring a nightgown or any of my things," said Jenny. "I thought we could get some of them after we came back."

"You won't need a nightgown," Moore replied.

Jenny undressed and got into bed. Arthur had undressed faster and was waiting for her there.

"Now what do we do?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"We're married. What are we supposed to do?"

Jenny laughed. "Why just act like you always have when we've been together, like you did on the way home."

"Yes, but we didn't have to get married to do that. What else do we do? Don't keep me waiting any longer."

"There isn't anything else," laughed Jenny. "At least nothing I know about."

Arthur knew Jenny was joking, but he didn't like her sense of humor. She had made him wait all during the ride home, and now she was still refusing to provide the new pleasure. He wished he had married some other girl.

"I can't wait any longer," he said.

"You don't have to wait," she replied. "It's you that's keepin' me waitin'."

"But we're married. What are the things to do after gettin' married? What do people get married for? Hurry, I've waited too long now."

Jenny laughed again, or, rather, continued to laugh. She had not stopped laughing since this conversation started.

“There’s nothin’ to marryin’, ’cept that I live in your house, and people call me Mrs. Moore,” she said. “We can sleep together now instead of goin’ walkin’. And if I have babies people won’t look at me funny and act like they was better’n me.”

This was carrying the joke too far. “What d’you s’pose I married you for?” Arthur demanded. “Come on now, show me what marriage is all about.”

“I can’t give you a baby yet,” Jenny replied.

“You’ll have to wait a while. All we can do now is try to get one started.”

Arthur began to have a horrible suspicion that Jenny was telling the truth, that marriage was all a hoax. If there were any other physical pleasure it seemed as though he would have heard some inkling of what it was. He had heard plenty of stories about other bodily affairs of men and women.

Arthur said no more. He satisfied himself with Jenny in the usual way, then dressed and went out to feed his rattlers. Watching the snakes tangle and untangle themselves silently in the twilight brought meditations.

It might be that Jenny was still joking and trying to see how long she could keep him from knowing the new pleasure, but it seemed more likely that there was nothing new to marriage, only what he had been doing all along.

Marriage was nothing but a trick women had for forcing men to support them and their children the rest of their lives. No wonder Jenny had laughed when he asked her what marriage was. She had swindled him into buying her. It was as though he had bought a cow with the understanding that it would give whisky only to find that it was even dry of milk. He was worse off than though he had bought a dry cow. He had only seen Jenny when he wanted to before. Now he would have to see her every time he went into the house. Perhaps she would even come out to the barn and fields to see him.

The secret of marriage was only that women had

nothing new to show their husbands. Women were all fakers and robbers, each with this one aim in mind: to live with a man and make him feed and clothe her until she died. And he had let one of these bandits into his house! Why couldn’t he have seen through this trickery of women? Jenny must have hypnotized him.

Arthur Moore spoke very little to Jenny the next day. When no new pleasure was revealed that night, Arthur was sure his conclusions were right: he had been defrauded. He came in from the barn for breakfast the next morning in a very happy mood. He joked with his wife and told her he was going to build a closet for her clothes.

After he had gone, Jenny was bitten by a large brownish rattlesnake as she went out the back door.

When Arthur came home from the fields for dinner the snake was sunning itself on the doorstep. Jenny was on the kitchen floor, dead.

“Nobody can say that I beat my wife,” he said to the snake, laughing for the first time in two days.

Arthur put the rattler back in the pen and then measured Jenny for a coffin.

CHAPTER XVII

A WITCH'S BROOM THAT DID NOT FLY

IT was the belief of David Hume that his mother, Sarah, was a witch.

She had one companion: a broom, which he thought she used nights for trips through the sky. The broom was seldom out of her hands. She carried it everywhere she went on the farm. When she had to use both hands for something else, the broom was placed nearby and picked up again as soon as possible. When she went to bed, the broom was left leaning against a chair within easy reach from her pillow.

Mrs. Sarah Hume smoked a pipe and often talked to herself — not very often to other people. She seldom used the broom for its customary purpose but carried it more as a man carries a cane. When she did sweep, it was with energy that raised a mist of dust which settled onto the walls, ceiling, and furniture.

She never discussed the nocturnal broom-flights David suspected. David did not dare mention them, so she had no knowledge of this power. Had he told her of these air trips, the idea would have been an inspiration to Mrs. Hume. The thought of flying through the air on her broom at night would have appealed to her, and she might have tried it by

jumping from her second-story bedroom window astride of the broom.

David Hume was afraid of his mother and her broom. She had a way of staring through her wrinkles at him without speaking that made him feel cold. He avoided her presence as much as possible, only coming into the house from the barn or fields when he felt hungry. He frequently took his lunch when he left in the morning.

In the winter he spent the daylight hours in the barn, talking to the horse and cow. He could not afford to talk to his whisky glass more than once a week.

Mrs. Hume usually forgot to get the meals. When she did do any cooking she usually forgot her son and prepared only enough food for herself. David preferred to get his own meals. Witches had access to strange potions which might be put in the food and cause any desired change in him. He felt that his mother could turn him into anything from a cow to a blade of grass.

On the rare occasions when Sarah Hume did make a meal for two David lost his appetite but ate his share for fear of angering her if he didn't.

He never disputed his mother's whims. Whatever he thought she wanted he did or provided at once insofar as possible. If she broke her silence, David listened intently. This might be his death knell. Every word she spoke was either a reflection of

dogmatic truth or a command that must be carried out instantly. If she had asked him to set fire to the

house he would have done so immediately and without removing any of his belongings. An angry witch would cause worse happenings than anything a pacified one could order him to do.

David Hume bought tobacco for his mother's pipe and left it on the kitchen table where she would see it. Once he had left a bottle of whisky there while he went to get a cup. He returned with the cup, but the bottle had disappeared. He went out to the barn, where he was awakened from a nap by his mother's singing a dirge that frightened him. He spent the night in the barn, afraid to return to the house. The next morning he found the whisky bottle on the kitchen table with only a little of its original contents remaining.

Hume used to have very poor success with his crops. It was said that only he could tell which were his gardens and which his hay fields. Another account was that he forgot which fields he had planted.

The fact was that he had relied to a large extent on his mother's powers of witchcraft to tend the crops. He thought she should be willing to make the few magic motions necessary to eliminate weeds and bugs. When the weeds became higher than the plants he went to work with a hoe, disappointed at his mother's indifference to their mutual welfare.

His crops had improved after David came to the conclusion that his mother's powers were only for evil doings. She could not exercise influence in a way that would be beneficial. After that he tended

his gardens without waiting for the assistance of witchcraft and was pleased with the harvest.

But the stock jokes about his hay gardens continued as accepted conventionalities. David Hume was not annoyed by these jokes. He enjoyed having his name used as a topic for conversation and listened to all versions of his gardens with a happy smile.

He was especially proud of the fact that an important annual event had been named after him: the Hume hay storm. The fact that his hay crop was spoiled by this rain was incidental. It was this storm bearing his name that all the farmers waited for before starting their haying. This storm made him an important figure in Menham.

One night Mrs. Hume was talking to her broom and fondling the handle affectionately as David came into the kitchen for supper.

"No, George," she said. "I don't want to go way up in the loft. Why ain't it all right right here? No-one will see us. Oh, come on. What are you scared of? Well, if I do have a baby I've got a father for it, ain't I? David will think it's his, and I'll name

it after him. Well, all right then, let's go up in the loft." Mrs. Hume paused and sighed. "Poor George," she continued. "It's too bad David found us. But anyhow we named it David after him."

David always stayed away when his mother was entertaining invisible callers. He had run into the barn for shelter.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALICE'S SECRET FOR FONDLING

ALICE GOODE was having very poor success with Felix Dole. He still went walking with her and took her by the hand, but walking hand in hand is a poor way of answering the biologic urge in question. Alice was becoming discouraged. Her summary of the case was, "He acts as though I had some disease."

Felix could never think of anything to talk about when he was with Alice. The hand that held hers, or in which she kept hers, became lifeless during these contacts. The heat went from it, and its fingers became paralyzed. Alice felt as though she were holding a piece of damp wood. And Felix seemed to be trying to walk at arm's length.

The death of Silas Goode had given Felix a topic of conversation that he seemed to enjoy. Over and over again he told Alice how sorry he was that her father had been killed and how much he had liked the funeral oration of Deacon Ira Ormsby. (Felix had not yet joined the farmers' drinking fraternity.) He said he had wanted to help fill in the grave and had regretted ever since that he forgot to bring a shovel.

He spoke these sentiments as though he were reciting

something he had memorized. His words did not vary from night to night, and, after the first few recitals, were monotonous for Alice, who began to interrupt and change the subject. Except for Felix Dole's reiteration of the matter her father's death would have left her mind much sooner.

Felix had offered to help Alice and her mother tend the crops Silas had left behind. This was welcome assistance and pleased Mrs. Emma Goode very much. Arthur Moore had not even mentioned the crops. It pleased Alice, too, but she would have been more pleased if Felix had offered to kiss and fondle her.

Alice arranged to work in the fields whenever Felix was there. Felix worked harder and faster when Alice was near. His one interest in life seemed to be the weeding or hoeing he was doing. He would not look up from his labors and took no rest periods, having the manner of a worker being watched by a factory foreman. If Alice had left the field he would have taken a long rest and with much relief.

Felix had had dreams about Alice. He knew many of the so-called secrets of sex and had enjoyed the versions of them he had had while asleep. He did not know the secret combinations of his body's inhibitions, which insisted that he make no allusions to such matters in the presence of Alice's material body.

He felt that even if they were married he would be afraid to go to bed with Alice, and that if he should go to bed with her he would be afraid even to touch her hand. He had a feeling of relief when

he was alone after a walk with Alice, yet he was soon looking forward to another walk.

He wondered if the magic words of a marriage ceremony could show him how to make himself deliberately and calmly go about trying to give a girl a child. If he were sure this secret would be revealed he would have asked Alice to marry him. Perhaps this was why people got married: to get the secret for obtaining the courage to embrace one another. Perhaps if he and Alice attended a wedding they could get this secret without being married themselves. But he would not dare invite her to go to a wedding even if there were one to take her to. It would be like asking her to take off her clothes and lie down.

Felix did not dare ask Alice to marry him. If the necessary secret were not revealed, he might have to spend the rest of his nights sitting in a chair in their bedroom or sleeping on the floor. Then, too, it would take just as much courage to ask her to marry him as to go about making the advances that marriage called for. More, in fact, for in starting to make the advances he would not have to get up the extra courage needed for a vocal request. He was stronger than Alice and could overpower her physically. But first he would have to overpower himself mentally and find out how to act toward her as he did in his dreams. Perhaps if he could go to sleep while he was with Alice.

While they were working together in a field one evening Alice had an idea. Why was a girl supposed

to wait for a boy to take the aggressive? If she should kiss Felix it ought to help matters. Then he might kiss her and start to squeeze her breast and force her to lie down with him.

When darkness came Alice suggested that they take a walk. This was a routine suggestion. At an isolated spot Alice made use of her plan. She gave Felix a hasty kiss and waited to see what he would do.

Felix stopped walking. His whole body took on the characteristics of the hand that held Alice’s. His hand dropped from hers. He had a feeling of resentment. She was telling him she knew how to make him get up courage and at the same time saying she wouldn’t let him know the secret. Alice knew the secret and was taunting him for not knowing it. If he could only fall asleep — or if she would tell him the secret.

Alice could not get Felix to take her hand again during the rest of the walk.

CHAPTER XIX

PETER BRUSH REMAINS FAITHFUL TO AN AGREEMENT

IT was a happy day for Mrs. Anna Lyman. This was the day Peter Brush, the peddler, would come to Menham and to her house with his wares. He had promised to arrive early on this visit. She had sent her husband, John, to his whisky cup at Lem Witherbee's before breakfast by giving him an inspiring lecture on the evils of liquor while he dressed.

Walking along the road from Westham to Menham, Peter Brush suddenly recalled this engagement, but he could not remember who the hostess was to be. There was only one woman in Menham who had done anything but buy or refuse to buy his goods, but who was she?

This lapse of memory annoyed him. What should he do: kiss each woman in Menham as she came to the door or merely try to sell his wares as usual and wait until one of the women kissed him?

The second process of elimination would be safer, yet would the woman in question take the aggressive after he had greeted her in such a cold manner? She might be insulted and think he was insisting that she buy something before he would change from his role of a polite peddler. She had led him on before, but

this time she would expect him to show a similar interest in her.

Perhaps he would recognize the woman when she came to the door. This did not seem likely. He knew all of the Menham housewives by sight. As he brought their faces to mind in an effort to force his memory to respond, the only thought that accompanied most of them was, "I hope it's not her."

Instead of kissing each woman, he might change his manner of greeting and say, "Good morning, dear," or, "The days have been years since my last visit, my love," or, "Seeing you again is the biggest event in my life, darling."

If the woman did not react with the proper spirit he could change the subject at once and start to discuss his goods. If she seemed pleased at the greeting he would know he had found the right party. Peter Brush rehearsed numerous possible greetings involving affection.

The first house he came to in Menham was that of Mrs. Sadie Sadler. He waved to her husband, Jonathan, working in a cornfield some distance from the house. The woman he sought had a husband, he remembered. This might be she. He knocked at the farmhouse door with his lines of love running through his mind one after another.

Mrs. Sadler, with red cheeks and a body that was plump but by no means obese, opened the door.

"Er, darling, I have looked forward to seeing you again since, er, good morning, dearest," Peter mumbled.

Mrs. Sadler looked about the farmyard hastily. No-one was in sight.

"Won't you come in," she said.

He had found the right woman on the first guess. Peter Brush removed his pack and entered the kitchen. He pulled Sadie into his arms and squeezed and kissed her. She stepped back in surprise at first but offered no resistence. She said nothing when he led her to a sofa he saw in the parlor.

There came a pause in their love-making, which had soon become mutual. Peter rose to his feet. Mrs. Sadler sighed and lay motionless.

"Why haven't you been like this before?" she asked.

Peter Brush sat down. Was this true? Had he made a new conquest instead of finding the woman he had arranged to make love with today?

"You never used to do anything but try and sell me things," Sadie continued. "Next time you come to Menham I'll see to it that Jonathan is away, and we'll have the whole day to ourselves."

Yes, it must be a new conquest. He would have two women in the same town each expecting him to spend the day with them when he came again. He would have to arrange to get away from the first one at noon and apologize to the second for his late arrival. Whether or not he would be physically equal to the assignment was a still more important problem.

At any rate, he had to keep his other appointment for today. Peter assured Sadie he would come prepared

to spend the day with her on his next trip to Menham and made her a present of a metal plate in the shape of a cow's head for a weather vane decoration. If his memory should fail again, this vane would tell him which was the right house. Sadie kissed Peter, and he went on his way to find today's correct mistress, who, his memory did not yet recall, should have been Anna Lyman.

The next house was that of Edward Jones. He was nowhere in sight, and Mrs. Edna Jones came to the door, smiling and slender.

"Darling, I have looked forward to this day ever since my last visit," said Peter.

Mrs. Jones asked him to come in. This must be the woman he had been looking for. He kissed her. She kissed him back. They were soon on the parlor sofa. Words were not necessary and were not used until Edna sat up and said, "Why haven't you done this before? Why have you always been so businesslike until today?"

Peter felt something jump inside him. This must be still another conquest.

Mrs. Jones said he would have to leave soon because her husband would be home, but proceeded to make plans for Peter's next visit. She would have Edward spend the day at Lem Witherbee's. Peter could do nothing but agree with her arrangements. He gave her a weather vane in the shape of a cow's head and left with the understanding that they would spend the day together when he came again.

Peter Brush was perplexed. Now he had three

women to deal with in something besides his wares, and the stock required was limited. He had only thought of these farmer's wives as customers before. Now they were all suddenly becoming his mistresses in the same day and in a most inconvenient manner. He felt that he must remain faithful to his original agreement for today, yet this seemed an unpleasant duty and an effort now rather than a pleasure.

There were four more houses before reaching the Lyman farm. But, faithful to his promised role for the day, Peter continued to greet the women there with rehearsed tenderness. One of them might be the one he was to visit, and he must act accordingly.

He was only repulsed at one of these dwellings. At this house the woman spoke first and said she wanted to buy some needles. This was a relief for Peter, who was certain that the one he sought would have a more personal greeting.

Each of the other three women had parlor sofas, and their husbands were in the fields. Not until the sofas had been used did their remarks inform Peter that they were new conquests. Each agreed that her husband would not be on the farm when he came again and that Peter would spend the day with her.

Peter gave each a weather vane in the shape of a cow's head. He was certain that each new effort on a sofa was his last, but more energy seemed to develop between houses for another final attempt.

With each finale came a feeling of consolation. He had found the right woman and been able to prove true to their agreement. He could soon go about

his usual trade in peace. Then came a question from the woman as to why he had not offered this stock in trade on a previous visit, and his troubles and worries were multiplied.

Most of the women had had very little to offer him in the way of beauty. They seemed still uglier in Peter's overworked state. Peter's tradesman's attitude told him he was paying high prices for merchandise he did not want, but his sense of faithfulness assured him that women appeared to him as something entirely different

than this ordinarily. Perhaps with this assurance he was too tolerant in overlooking physical distortions when making his greetings.

Peter had taken a nap in a field during the noon hour. When he finally neared the Lyman farm it was late in the afternoon. After his fifth new conquest Peter had decided he would have to change his tactics. He would revert back to his customary sales talk and wait for the woman in question to greet him. It seemed too bad to have to approach her so coldly, but there were limits even to faithfulness.

He walked to the Lyman kitchen door feeling tired and emaciated. He hoped the woman he had the appointment with had moved to some other country, or that her memory was as vague as his. Perhaps she had forgotten him, and any efforts to remain faithful were only advances to other women. He might have been faithful to his agreement already without either he or she realizing it.

Anna came to the door. She showed evidences of

anger and impatience. “Where have you been?” she demanded. “You promised to be here early in the morning, and here it is almost night.”

So this was she. He had found the woman at last. Peter took a cow’s head weather vane from his pack and gave it to her at once.

“Darling, I have walked all night to be with you,” said Peter, feeling that he could now elaborate on the greetings he had rehearsed that morning, and at the same time having an idea. “I have reached my goal at last, but I am so tired I can hardly stand.”

“You poor man,” said Mrs. Lyman tenderly. “You lay right down and rest. But it’s funny you never seemed to have any trouble before gettin’ here on the right day.”

“No, never before,” agreed Peter, lying down on the parlor sofa and hoping that a little sleep would enable him to be faithful. This would actually be the final attempt, the grand finale, and he must rouse all his reserve energies to make it a success.

“Five and one is six,” he thought, closing his eyes. “At least there won’t be a seventh.”

“You’re sure it wasn’t some woman who made you late?” asked Mrs. Lyman with pretended suspicion.

“No other woman has been in my mind,” replied Peter. “I’ve been faithful to you.”

CHAPTER XX

GRADUATION EXERCISES

HENRIETTA HARRIET HELEN HUMMER was learning to walk on his hind legs. He was proceeding in a manner that probably compared poorly with that of his first four-legged ancestors who had tried this.

He had an advantage over these evolutionary ancestors in having the example of Miss Hummer walking on two legs to imitate. But he also was at a disadvantage through being a baby. The ancestors probably had waited until they were adults before making the attempt.

Henrietta was further handicapped through having to carry on his experiments in secret for any degree of comfort. Miss Hummer gave him no assistance or encouragement. In fact, when she saw him standing erect clutching to a table leg or chair she released his grip and let him fall to the floor. Had she realized her manner of walking could be of any assistance as a pattern for his efforts she might have crawled on her hands and knees when in his sight.

Miss Hummer was resigned to the fact that Henrietta probably would learn to walk eventually, but she wanted to keep this man in her power groveling before her on the floor as long as possible. She became

nervous at the evidences of growth he was showing. She had the feeling she was raising a monster that was developing strength to overpower her.

What would she do when Henrietta did walk on two legs and grew into a strong man? The strength would not be diminished even if she could make him believe he was a woman. He would still be in her power legally, but she would be at his mercy physically. But perhaps he would not grow to be a *strong* man. Miss Hummer consoled herself with this thought.

Her war with the male conspiracy for the promotion of wickedness was a very serious matter. The enemy had taken over most of her territory and was trying to turn her prisoner into a beast of its own kind that could perform all sorts of tortures on her.

She must not let Henrietta have access to any such powers. She would prove her superior strength daily and accustom him to the fact that he could never be her equal. She could not surrender in this war in which she had become engulfed. It was a fight to the finish, and she was the winner as long as she kept this man in her power, regardless of the disadvantages involved.

The kitchen door had remained bolted ever since Miss Hummer's second encounter with a snake near the woodshed. She was afraid to go anywhere on her land except out the path from the front door to the road. Even this was a risk. She felt as though she were running a gantlet of snakes whenever she attempted it.

She had had piles of wood placed against the front of the house. This provided a fuel supply on reasonably safe ground and acted as an extra barricade for her fortress.

Having lasted out most of the summer in her house, Miss Hummer had come to believe that this was a safe citadel. She had not seen the second snake since her one meeting with it, but was sure it was in hiding, waiting to attack her and to communicate with Henrietta. All windows were kept locked. Henrietta had drafts of fresh air only when the front door was slowly opened and hastily closed by Miss Hummer on the few occasions that she went out.

Having safely brought in an armful of wood one day and pushed Henrietta's hands from the wall, which was holding him upright, Miss Hummer had a very pleasing thought: as Henrietta grew in size she could use correspondingly larger switches in demonstrating her authority and power.

The small birch branches she had been using would not be so effective when Henrietta increased in size. She could use larger sticks at each evidence of increased strength on the part of the prisoner. Pieces of kindling would be very good when Henrietta became a little bigger. Then larger pieces of wood, and larger and larger until — Miss Hummer gasped: suppose he should get so big she could not wield a club large enough to hurt him?

But the former thought was too pleasing to be frightened away by a danger of no immediate concern. The larger Henrietta became the more of him

there would be to hurt. The stronger he became the more she could hurt him without too serious results.

She could use more energy together with the larger sticks. The whippings could last longer and be given at more frequent intervals. An unpleasant thought came to mind again but was hastily driven out: suppose he became so strong she could tire herself out without chastising him properly?

Miss Hummer examined the wood she had brought in. She began to sort it out in rows according to size. She went out several times for more varieties until small piles of wood stretched all along one side of the kitchen. Kindling was at one end and small logs at the other with gradual increases in the size of the sticks in each pile.

Now she could look forward to Henrietta's growth. As he increased in size she could increase the size of her weapons accordingly by merely drawing from the next pile in the series. If he should suddenly obtain new powers, she was ready to meet the emergency. Miss Hummer wished Henrietta were a little larger now so she could graduate him from the birch twigs. She looked at him. He was larger than when he had been delivered from Scofield. She began to sort out the pile of switches behind the stove, breaking the smaller ones and saving the largest ones.

She looked at Henrietta again and then at the twigs she now had in store for him. They would not do. Henrietta had grown faster than she had realized. He might he laughing to himself at her whippings

already. This unpleasant thought was of immediate concern and could not be dismissed.

Miss Hummer took a knife from a drawer and went out the front door to brave the gantlet of snakes and collect a new assortment of branches by the side of the road.

Henrietta continued his secret experiments in walking. He crawled to the piles of wood and pulled himself onto his feet by means of one of them.

CHAPTER XXI

JOHN LYMAN SEEKS JUSTICE FOR MINNIE MULLER

THERE were many theories as to which farmer in Menham Minnie Muller's features most resembled.

Every member of the Saturday night drinking fraternity who was old enough had been carefully diagnosed in loud sessions of mirth and shown to have been the pattern she had followed. David Hume wished he were older so that he could be included in these discussions, but he had been only a little boy in the days when Mrs. Nancy Muller was eligible.

At other times Minnie and her parentage were forgotten while the farmers compared stories of walks they had taken with Nancy. Often the younger men invented accounts of their own so they could participate in these memoirs, but such admissions never made them eligible for mention when the topic of parentage was before the meeting. The older men had to elaborate their versions still more in order to keep abreast of these less accurate stories.

David Hume would have given an account of his walks with Nancy Muller but for the fact that he could not think of anything that had not been said.

When the latter topic came up at a properly timed point in John Lyman's conversation with his whisky

mug, his thoughts of the moment about Minnie were intensified.

Why all this talk about Nancy Muller? It was time Minnie received more acknowledgment in such dissertations. Her mother had been a celebrity long enough and had her full share of renown. Minnie was not yet considered as anything but somebody's child. She was a very pretty girl and deserved appreciation as such. Minnie could become just as celebrated a figure as her mother and deserved a proper share of distinction. She was obscured by her mother's fame. Steps should be taken to overshadow her mother by hers.

At these times John Lyman felt that he had received a call. He had more than a physical desire. It was his duty to bring Minnie into repute. It was unjust that Nancy should still have the prestige her daughter was now entitled to.

Stories about Nancy had become myths and fables. Stories about Minnie would be current and timely news. There would be a new topic for diversion at Lem Witherbee's. Some of the farmers who had a factual basis for their accounts of walks with Nancy would at least have to change the name of the heroine in order to contribute stories to the talks about Minnie.

There might come another new topic involving parentage and the farmer who most resembled the child. Then Minnie would be of equal fame with Nancy. The older farmers would be neglected in

the new discussion as the younger ones had been before.

There would be two distinct schools of expression at Lem Witherbee's. Perhaps the newer school would prove its own superiority as well as Minnie's by producing a second child. Then Minnie would rank far above Nancy, and the older school would suffer ridicule instead of the prominence it now enjoyed.

Usually a distraction — such as the discovery he was talking to one of the initials instead of a favorite rose on his whisky cup — interrupted John Lyman's meditations about Minnie.

This night he looked down at his cup and saw the rose listening patiently. The rose told him there might be some who could claim membership in both schools but that this was incidental. He should heed the call and help Minnie attain the distinction that was her due.

John drank what was in his cup, bought another drink, and swallowed that. He placed the mug on the counter with unspoken good-bys that only it could hear and left to find Minnie Muller.

It was Minnie's night to walk with Paul Turner, her only male companion. He might have started the new school had he been an attendant at Lem Witherbee's. Andrew Cline had told him when he hired him that he would have to remain sober, so Paul had looked for other diversions.

Walking toward Minnie's house, John Lyman passed the town hall and saw two figures coming out

from behind it. He felt the desire to talk to someone and stopped. One of the figures was walking away from the other. In a disinterested tone it made the parting remark, "All right then, I'll see you Wednesday."

John recognized Paul Turner and saw that the other figure was a girl. This latter observation recalled his mission, and he asked with sudden enthusiasm, "Is that Minnie Muller with you?"

"Yeah," Paul replied without stopping. He did not like the smell of liquor when he could not drink. "I'm all through with her; go to it."

CHAPTER XXII

TWO GLASSES AND A ROW OF KEGS

ALFRED DOLE had two whisky glasses, one at Lem Witherbee's store and one in his barn. The latter receptacle had received its apprenticeship at the store and then been transferred to new duties at the barn. There it was seldom used for whisky but proved itself equally capable of embracing hard cider.

At first Dole had thought he would be unfaithful to the original glass in adopting a second one to share his confidences and act as his most intimate friend. He had tried taking the glass with him when he went from one drinking resort to the other, but this involved the danger of breakage. He had fallen down more than once on this trip between his barn and Lem Witherbee's.

Before employing a second glass for permanent use, Alfred had apologized profusely and, drunkenly to the first, which replied in favor of the idea and advised him that if it were kept in the seclusion of his barn they could have more privacy and see each other more often.

Most of Alfred Dole's work around the farm was done in the morning and early afternoon. He made frequent visits to his glass during this time, but

usually it was not until late afternoon that the conversation became of sufficient importance to justify suspending all other operations to continue it.

Alfred Dole worked hardest when his apples were ripe. He picked and sorted them carefully, saving out the poorer ones for eating and cooking purposes. All the others were run through his cider press. The juice was kept in large kegs that formed a symmetrical double row along the rear of the barn.

A drinking corner had been prepared at one end of the row. There the keg being used was propped up in front of a chair. When not in Dole's hand, the glass was hidden in a niche above a beam overhead.

Other farmers had called on Dole when he was settled in this corner, but very little hospitality was extended. Sometimes Dole would speak to the visitor. Usually he continued to speak to his glass. Despite the number of kegs, there was only one chair and only one glass. It did not take long for a visitor to realize that Alfred could get along very nicely without them.

When little Mary Dole was still younger she had once come running to her mother with the startling discovery, "Ma, Pa's talkin' to himself."

"No, he's not," Mrs. Jessie Dole had replied. "He's talkin' to his whisky glass."

While Felix Dole was attending to the nightly chores around the barn his father would sometimes look up from his glass and talk to him. A father should give his son good advice and show some interest in his welfare.

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"How is it you never come over to Lem Witherbee's on Saturday nights?" he would ask. He had heard Felix's answer to this question many times and so continued without waiting to hear it again, "You ain't got no money? Well, that's too bad. Hmmm. Well, maybe Lem would trust you for a few Saturdays. Get your whisky cup into trainin' there and maybe it'll tell you how to keep it goin'. A whisky cup will give you a lot of good advice. And Lem always likes to get a new customer. I guess he'd trust you all right for a while."

Felix was never very interested in this advice, principally for the reason that it came from his father. If Alfred had advised him to keep away from Lem Witherbee's on Saturday nights Felix probably would have run up as large a bill there as Lem would allow.

Alfred Dole would lapse back into his reveries and direct his conversation to the cup again. If it was getting dark by this time, he would make some comment about the excellence of the cider crop and ask Felix to bring a lantern — he had never asked him to bring a cup.

The Dole cider glass had one secret it had not revealed to Alfred: it had two users. Since the glass was kept in a secret hiding place, Alfred Dole had no suspicion that any one else could use it. Nor did he believe his glass capable of such infidelity as to become another person's companion even once without telling him.

But Mrs. Jessie Dole had located the container and acquired a taste for hard cider both at the same time

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one morning. Since then she had watched from the kitchen window for her husband to enter and leave the barn during his working hours. When he left she entered. She would time her return to the kitchen window so as not to conflict with his next arrival. After he had come and gone again, she would go back to the barn.

This program interfered with her housework but was much more pleasant. Mary Dole had learned to do many household tasks and was given an opportunity to learn more.

Felix Dole noticed his mother had become somewhat hilarious and sometimes did strange things, but gave the matter little thought. If she wanted to sing and stagger about the kitchen, that was her affair. Alfred Dole noticed no change. Any increase in verbosity or gayety was quite in keeping with his mood when he came in for dinner.

After her husband began his extended conversation with his glass late in the afternoon Mrs. Dole had to suspend her visits to the keg for the day. She regretted this, but there seemed nothing she could do about it.

One day she got up courage. When Alfred Dole came to the barn from the fields for the last time he saw an unexpected sight. At the opposite end of the row of kegs from his drinking corner was another chair. His wife was sitting there engaged in conversation with a glass of cider in her hand. There was a spigot in the keg in front of her.

This tapping of his cider supply was bad enough,

but the glass in her hand was his. Alfred seized the glass. Jessie seized it back again. She raised it in the air as though about to throw it to the floor.

"Don't!" cried Alfred. "Don't break it! Give me the glass, and I'll let you stay here. You can have that corner, and I'll stay in this one."

Mrs. Dole returned the glass to her husband. "Remember, now, this corner is mine," she said. She stumbled back into her chair and reached beneath it. Her hand encircled a cup she had brought from the kitchen, and she lifted it to the spigot.

After that there were two drinking corners, two chairs, and two hidden glasses in the Dole barn, and Jessie no longer kept a lookout from the kitchen window.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN INTEMPERANCE UNION

ANOTHER drinker, with equal rights and privileges, to help drain the Dole cider kegs was not in keeping with Alfred Dole's conception of a sanctum. He was being robbed of his solitude as well as his cider.

The situation was still worse because the other party was a woman, and even more objectionable because the woman was his wife.

When he and Jessie Dole occupied their respective drinking corners, filling their glasses from their respective kegs, Alfred did not converse with her, but neither did he talk with his glass as freely as before. Alfred took no steps to eject Jessie. Having established herself, she became an accepted part of the barn routine, somewhat the same as though the roof had disappeared and rain was discomforting him. Only in this case Alfred had no recourse to an umbrella.

Jessie's drinking schedule was patterned after Alfred's. During the day she alternately visited the barn and helped Mary with the housework. Usually at precisely the same time that Alfred established himself in his corner for a prolonged stay Jessie did the same in hers. She also became intimate with her

glass, and a close friendship was formed which involved daily conversations.

Alfred continually thought of planting more apple trees and filling more kegs. Perhaps the present supply would be exhausted before this year's cider was ready. Another year the kegs would surely go dry too soon. Such worries increased his discomfort. He had watched over the contents of these kegs like a miser. Now his resources were being squandered by an invader. Jessie was quite happy as long as the spigot before her brought forth a brownish-white flow.

Jessie sometimes had trouble getting back to the house at night. She was given no assistance by Alfred, who enjoyed her difficulties unless he were having too much trouble keeping himself upright to notice them. Once Jessie had woke in the morning on the barn floor, another time on the steps of the back stoop.

But Alfred Dole's worries and discomforts were to be increased. When Felix Dole, pleased at having a topic for conversation, told Alice Goode that his mother had established a drinking corner in his father's barn, she became interested for the first time in what he had to say.

Mrs. Emma Goode came to call on Mrs. Dole the next day in the barn. Other women promptly made similar visits one after another, some panting as they arrived.

Mrs. Dole greeted them all cordially. She got another glass from the kitchen when Mrs. Goode came, and each new caller filled it.

The women of Menham saw hopes of emancipation. It was possible for them to usurp the drinking pleasures heretofore reserved for men. Why should they continue to be denied them? They were men's equals. They should enjoy men's privileges. These thoughts possessed each woman in turn as she saw the enlightenment that had come to Mrs. Dole. The opinion was intensified after sampling the cider.

Alfred Dole was almost frightened away several times when he entered the barn and saw two women drinking his cider. He said nothing but wished they had been taking poison. His row of sacred kegs was being prostituted. His shrine was being defiled.

"Women are a lot of robbers," he told his glass in a psychic manner that could not be overheard by Mrs. Sadler and his wife. "Stealin's their line. If I didn't know these damn women I could shoot 'em, but since I know 'em I s'pose I got to stand for their stealin'."

The following Saturday night a new institution was established. The women of Menham — with the exception of Miss Hummer — gathered in the Dole barn in a body. Each brought a glass or cup, and a women's drinking fraternity got under way.

The men in their bachelor quarters at Lem Witherbee's knew nothing of the women's meeting until they started home. The women had just adjourned and were seeking their domiciles with uncertain steps. Groups of men and women bound in the same directions became mingled. Many men were

surprised to find themselves talking to their wife or to somebody else's.

John Lyman was still talking to Mrs. Sadler when he arrived at his bedroom. But since Anna Lyman had stopped to talk with Edward Jones, there were no disagreements until she arrived home and could not find room in the bed.

Mrs. Whiter started to accompany Arthur Moore to his farm, but gave up the attempt after she fell down without his noticing her disappearance. There were other confusions, but in due time all couples were sorted out in the usual manner, and all members of both fraternities were in their own beds, except for Mrs. Muller who slept in front of the town hall.

Having asserted their rights and become emancipated, the women of Menham continued their Saturday night gatherings as religiously as the men. Although there was no set time for abandoning the cups, both groups always seemed to disband at times that brought their members together. Alfred Dole could not believe the stories that these meetings were being held in his barn until an alarming depletion in the cider supply showed him that this, or something equally serious, was the case.

It was a sad situation. One robber had discovered his treasure and led a horde of companions there to help carry it away. His privacy was not so important now. Soon he would have to talk to an empty glass.

The women realized that the Dole kegs could not always be full and made plans accordingly. Apples would soon be ripe. They would hold a fair to help

raise money for kegs of their own and would press a crop of apples themselves.

They would move to new quarters, too. The town hall had no use as such. It had been the gift of a wealthy man who once lived in Menham and had the desire to be a selectman. He had adopted the title, and Menham had found itself the possessor of a town hall to prove his right to it. They would store the kegs in the town hall and hold their meetings there as soon as the new cider crop was ready.

The women contributed money for new kegs, and the fair held in the town hall brought nearly three dollars more. Mrs. Dole was made treasurer. It was agreed that she had given her share of apples already and that the present crop would all be furnished by the others.

A cider press loaned by Mrs. Goode was brought to the town hall when the apples were ready. Kegs had been delivered there, and apples were provided in wagon-loads by the women. For two days the women worked. Mrs. Dole even neglected her daytime visits to her barn, although she brought a bottle that required her attention quite often in the entry leading to the stage.

When all the kegs were filled and placed in proper arrangement, a padlock was applied to the door. The women had taken over the town hall, and men were barred.

“We’re all selectwomen now,” said Mrs. Dole.

“Yup, p’raps if we think of it some Saturday we can pass a few laws,” laughed Mrs. Cline.

CHAPTER XXIV

PETER BRUSH IS FAITHFUL TO SIX WOMEN

ALTHOUGH it was not Saturday night, there were six farmers drinking at Lem Witherbee's store. They had arrived early in the morning and showed no intentions of leaving until bedtime or later. It was the day Peter Brush was due to peddle his wares again in Menham.

The farmers were pleased to be able to form such an unexpected gathering, each having come with the thought that he would have only his whisky glass to talk to. All realized that unpleasant words of their wives had sent them there, and no questions were asked as to the subject matter involved.

Lem Witherbee was heartily in favor of this group of customers he suddenly found established before the drinking counter. He hoped this was an indication that local farmers were becoming more sensitive to the words of their wives.

The conversation started along the new conventional lines. Edward Jones gave the cue. "Who'd you go home with last Saturday night?" he asked, looking at the ceiling.

"Mrs. Sadler," replied John Lyman, smiling at Jonathan Sadler. "We got to my place and she said

she'd have to rest, so I took her in the parlor and let her lay down."

And while you and her was in the parlor," said Jonathan, "your wife and I was upstairs in your bed. We was helpin' each other along the road and decided your house was nearer than mine."

Both men laughed.

These pleasantries about the mix-up of wives on Saturday nights were intended only as an exchange of wit. Each man seemed to laugh a little more heartily when his own wife was involved. Every farmer relied wholly on his imagination for facts and realized the others did the same.

There were often no recollections of any actual details of happenings after leaving Lem Witherbee's. Any basis of truth that found its way into the accounts was accepted as the same sort of fiction as the rest. The confusion that now came on Saturday nights gave too free a rein to the imagination to let memory interfere. The actual mix-ups involved were not even considered.

The discussion of the previous Saturday night's post-drinking events continued until all members of the women's fraternity were properly mated with new mates.

John Lyman was soon thinking of other things. Should he start Minnie Muller on her path to fame now? On previous Saturday nights he had been tempted several times to broach this new subject which would soon be the most important topic of all, but he always decided to wait.

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He had a chance to collect a number of anecdotes that would give him a long head start on the others. And this topic would call for accounts of fact not theory — at least at first.

It would be better to make his important announcement regarding Nancy Muller's daughter on a Saturday night, at any rate, when all were present, John decided. In introducing his protégée he would want a full house to hear the facts. Lyman relaxed after this decision. The longer he kept Minnie's name out of the forum the longer he could have her practically to himself.

Six farmers' wives, each of whose husbands had installed a new weather vane in the shape of a cow's head on the barn, had put on their best dresses and taken seats at windows that gave a view of the road from Westham. Each was alone in her house and had very pleasant thoughts of a happy day ahead.

Peter Brush had not forgotten any of these ladies this time. They had been in his mind almost constantly since his last visit to Menham. And so had the problem of how to spend the same day alone with six different women in six different farmhouses.

He had to be faithful to six women this time. He could not keep his promise to all of them, and he did not dare brave this gantlet of women again in the manner that he had before. He considered omitting Menham from his route. But, no, he could remain faithful to one of the promises. This would have to be at the first house. He could not pass by any of these farms without being seen.

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Spending the day with Mrs. Sadler seemed quite agreeable to Peter Brush, and he continued toward Menham. It was better to keep one promise and break five than to break all six.

An idea came to Peter as he walked. If he had a messenger and knew the names of all the women involved, he might send a note to the other five and apologize for a tardy arrival. He might arrange to visit them on successive days and sleep at night in fields or woods between houses.

So long as nobody but the woman of the day saw him, the next one would assume he had just arrived in Menham, and the others would think he had gone on to the next town. He liked the idea but did not know how to obtain the essentials necessary for its execution. He had no messenger and was not sure of most of the names.

Just as he had decided that the scheme was impractical, Peter was overtaken by the mailman's buggy and given a ride. The mailman knew the names of the women and would leave letters for them. He also had envelopes. Peter had a pad of paper and a pencil.

He began to write, "Dearest Edna, I am sorry but I will be a day late getting to Menham and your house on this visit. I can hardly wait to see you again. Much love, Peter Brush."

The envelope was addressed to Mrs. Edna Jones. Peter began the next note, "Dearest Doris, I am sorry, but I will be two days late…" He wrote three others of similar nature. The last note informed

Mrs. Anna Lyman that he would be five days late.

The mailman took the letters and stopped to let Peter Brush out at Sadie Sadler's house.

CHAPTER XXV

ARTHUR MOORE ENVIES HIS SNAKES

ARTHUR MOORE had a banquet for his rattle snakes. In addition to the usual frogs and toads, he had several lizards, a rabbit, a rat that was still half alive, a large cage of mice he had allowed to breed and fatten after their captivity, and a brood of garter snakes he had picked up one by one as they began their solution of the mysteries of life.

Next to his whisky glass, Moore liked the companionship of his snakes better than any other. He liked to feed them the delicacies they enjoyed. He liked the way they ate, holding their struggling dainty in their mouths as though enjoying its suffering more than its flavor, and slowly forcing the morsel further inside them until most of the struggling was being done within the snakes' bodies.

Sometimes a snake took too big a mouthful and appeared to be suffering itself as the live food became stuck, still partly in the fresh air, but most of it too far within to be ejected. Such a state of affairs never acted as an emetic on the snake and would sometimes be prolonged for hours.

"That's only the first course," Arthur Moore would say to a snake in this predicament. He liked the way the snakes slept after a hearty

meal, often for days. He envied their hedonistic existence.

"They're either hungry and enjoyin' food or sleepy and enjoyin' sleep," he once told his whisky glass. "Never any work. And there's plenty of womensnakes for 'em to curl up with. They get tangled up with a lot of women all at the same time — or else it's the women that get tangled up with them. That's prob'ly it. But anyhow they don't try to get the men to marry 'em. It's me that's supportin' 'em all. I'd like to try bein' a snake and have a lot of women get curled up with me like that. I can only have one woman at a time now."

There was no particular occasion for today's sumptuous banquet. Arthur Moore was generally kind to his snakes and, having the food on hand, decided he would surprise them with this hearty repast.

"Everything but the knives and forks," he said, as he threw the small animals into the snake sty, much to their objection.

As he watched the snakes turn connoisseurs and select their courses, Arthur Moore began to think of women. He decided he wanted the use of a woman. At times such as this he wished it were possible to keep a wife hidden in some closet of his house, where he could take her out and lock her up again at will. As it was, he

would have to walk way over to Emma Goode's farm, which was more than half a mile even by the path through the woods.

Moore spit into the mass of snakes, with their

staring eyes that never closed. He felt inferior to these creatures that he raised. "They don't have to walk no half mile to get a woman," he thought. "It must be nice to live in a snake sty." He left the snakes to their pleasures and walked toward the Goode farm.

Alice Goode was working in the kitchen when Arthur Moore arrived. He resented her presence. He would have to take her mother into the barn or somewhere out of her daughter's sight. "Snakes don't have to worry about no-one seein' them," he thought.

"Where's your ma?" he asked Alice.

"She's gone over to see Mrs. Lyman," Alice replied.

What! Emma was not home! Arthur felt as though she had broken a promise to meet him at this exact time and place.

"How long 'fore she'll be back?"

"Oh, not for an hour or more. Want to come in and wait?"

Arthur Moore thought of his snakes. They didn't have to wait upon a woman's convenience. Their women couldn't go calling. He became impatient and thought of other women. Then he looked at Alice. She was a woman, and she was here at hand. Perhaps her mother had left her behind to attend to him.

His eyes stared at Alice in a way that brought the two thoughts, "This man's pitchfork killed your

father. But Arthur was a long ways off when it happened."

"There's something I was goin' to show your ma out in the barn," said Moore. "Come on out, and I'll show you."

Alice followed Arthur into the barn.

"It's up in that hayloft," he said.

Alice went up the ladder first. Arthur Moore smiled. He was glad Mrs. Goode was away. If he couldn't hide Emma from her daughter, he could hide her daughter from Emma. He should have thought of this before.

"If only I was a snake I could have 'em both at once," he mused as he followed Alice up the ladder.

CHAPTER XXVI

A BAWDY BABY

WITH the coming of winter to Menham, Miss Hummer regained her captured territory from the enemy. After the first snowstorm she unlocked her kitchen door and stepped into a drift with a feeling of conquest. She wished she had a flag of some sort she could unfurl in her back yard.

She looked for marks left by a snake's body among the soft white crystals. She knew snakes did not thrive in snow, but the one that had surrounded her house was more than a snake: it was a representative of the male conspiracy for the promotion of wickedness. There were no tracks of any kind, and Miss Hummer walked into her woodshed with confidence and without being attacked. To prove her victory she brought as much wood as she could carry back into the kitchen.

She considered letting Henrietta go out and play in the snow. She could outfit him in a nice light summer dress. There were no mittens or hats for him, and the shoes he had worn upon being delivered from Scofield would no longer go on his feet. He could play in the snow barefooted and bareheaded.

Then she reconsidered. The enemy had communicated with him when she left him outdoors in the

summer. They might do the same now in some diabolical manner. She could not take this chance. Her prisoner must be kept in confinement. Henrietta had once enjoyed it when she left him out in the rain. He might like the snow, too.

Henrietta now walked on two feet with considerable agility, although when Miss Hummer was near he generally dropped to his hands and knees. He did not cry as much as he had at first, even though he had been graduated to the first pile of sticks in the long series for his whippings. He almost never cried except when one of these sticks was in use. He seemed to realize that the sooner he cried on these occasions the sooner Miss Hummer's pleasures would be ended, also that the louder he cried the sooner this climax would come.

At other times Henrietta made strange noises with his mouth. Miss Hummer did not think he was talking, for she could not understand what he said. Yet he might be talking in some other language. He might be calling to the enemy.

He uttered these, sounds in a monotonous way that annoyed her. She had often tried to silence him, but the cadence would soon start again. Once she had stuffed a handkerchief in his mouth, but Henrietta finally removed it.

Sometimes Miss Hummer was certain Henrietta was talking in a mysterious tongue. He would address his remarks to a chair or table, the very things that had helped him learn to walk, or to the floor or one of the piles of wood. These listeners did not

answer him, but they might understand what he said. This made Miss Hummer uneasy. At other times Henrietta only mumbled or shouted to himself. Miss Hummer seldom talked to him.

On the day of the first snowstorm a small package was left in Miss Hummer's mailbox. Miss Hummer seldom received any mail. She was elated by the recovery of her property and became jubilant when she saw the flag on her mailbox go down. She had been waiting for this parcel.

"We'll have some fun now," she said to Henrietta.

Miss Hummer put on her overshoes and watched for the mailman's sleigh to disappear. She never went to the box until the mailman was far out of sight. The package contained a can of powder, a bottle of perfume, several sticks of rouge, and one black stick for the eyebrows.

Miss Hummer had a bitter contempt for anyone who used such things. A painted woman was a depraved woman. Powder and perfume were only added so that others could smell as well as see the flagrancy they flaunted. Painted faces were those who, in their shame, wished to cover up and disguise their own features.

Miss Hummer would as soon have asked Lem Witherbee to sleep with her as to have inquired if he carried rouge or eyebrow blacking. She had answered an advertisement in a magazine and in the same mail canceled her subscription to this immoral journal in which the needs of whores were displayed in such a disgraceful way.

But Miss Hummer had no intention of contaminating any part of her body with such lewd coverings or odors. She had a man in her power and was bringing him up to be a woman. She could not only make him a woman but a depraved woman of the lowest sort. She could cover him with these foul signs of iniquity and teach him to use them himself. Miss Hummer put on an old pair of gloves before opening the box. She handled its contents with the extreme tips of her fingers.

Even if Henrietta ever did find out his real sex, she could always gloat over the stigma of his early depravity. This would be a permanent stain. He had begun life with the garb of a prostitute. The contact with paint and powder would be a permanent blemish. These obscenities probably contained some germ that would infect him with the bawdy qualities they represented. He would be a demoralized woman and at the same time a man.

Miss Hummer placed Henrietta on her lap. She sprinkled powder and perfume on his head. She painted his lips red and his eyebrows black. She put large red spots on his cheeks. She would have to wear these gloves whenever she touched him now.

Henrietta had been surprised to find that it would not be necessary to cry after Miss Hummer had taken him into her lap. Miss Hummer placed him back on the floor and handed him a stick of rouge. He began to mark on a chair but was rudely interrupted.

He put one end of the rouge into his mouth. Miss Hummer brought it out to his lips and moved his

hand back and forth until Henrietta looked as though he had been drinking from a jar of jam.

"You'll learn," she said.

Miss Hummer smiled at Henrietta's appearance. Immorality, scandal, and shame were emphasized in his face more than in any other she had ever seen.

"You're a slut," she told Henrietta.

Henrietta said something that sounded like, "Slut."

"Yes, 'slut,'" replied Miss Hummer slowly, trying to teach him the right pronunciation. "You're a man, and you're a 'slut.' "

"Slut," said Henrietta, laughing. Such friendly attention when no visitor was in the house was something new.

Miss Hummer did not like to have Henrietta laugh. What was he laughing at now? at her? at the pollution with which she had covered him? He probably didn't know the seriousness of this stain. Wait until he grew up and found other girls and women shunning him for his profligacy, crossing to the other side of the road when they saw him.

And other men — Miss Hummer paused in her reflection. Suppose men should be attracted by Henrietta's show of indecency? This would lead to a discovery of his true sex, to his escape from her. She could not let this happen. She would make him so depraved that even men would be repulsed.

Miss Hummer picked up Henrietta again. She removed his dress and proceeded to scribble over his body at random with her red and black cosmetics.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PATH OF VIRTUE BRINGS REGRETS

ALL the women of Menham who were eligible now had keys to the padlock on the town hall. Saturday night festivities had been transferred there from the Dole barn with due ceremony, which included a parade, cups and glasses in hand, from the barn to the hall.

Mrs. Whiter was a full-fledged member of the sorority, but some thought she enjoyed more than her proper privileges. Her home was only a short distance from the hall, and she used her key and cup at times during the week unspecified by the other members.

Her informal visits were not always more than once a day, but frequently they were prolonged until dark. Sometimes she brought matches and a lamp. Other lamps had been contributed by other members, but Mrs. Whiter always preferred to bring her own. She had a fear that other people's lamps might explode. This made her restless during the first few drinks on Saturday nights with lamps on all sides of her flickering at the point of explosion.

Mrs. Whiter's explanation of her visits to the town hall at times other than Saturday nights was that she was acting as sentinel. The kegs of cider were too

valuable to be protected only by a padlock. A watchman should be on duty there at all times.

"So I have appointed myself guardian," she would say. "Whenever I can spare a minute, I go to the hall to make sure there are no burglars. If I can stay longer, of course I do."

Mrs. Whiter lived alone. Mrs. Muller did not understand why she should bear the title Mrs., having neither children nor husband, so she called her Miss Whiter. Mrs. Whiter sometimes retaliated by calling her Miss, but Mrs. Muller knew nothing of this.

Mrs. Muller had not heard of her neighbor's professed sentry duty, but she had seen her returning by night many times with a lighted lamp that followed a course somewhat like a leisurely firefly.

"Want any help?" Mrs. Muller had once hollered from her bedroom window.

"Yeah," came the reply, "there's more cider there than I can drink."

Mrs. Whiter had followed a path of virtue as prescribed by a maiden aunt and, barring an omission by Nature, had better proof of virginity than even Miss Hummer.

She had been brought up to consider her body as something obscene and indecent, a stigma of vice and dishonor that must always be covered with as many clothes as means permitted. A new petticoat was another covering in which to hide her awful body, and had always been a welcome addition to the mattress of clothes she wore already.

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As a girl she had been ashamed that most of her wicked face had to be exposed through a network of veils. She considered it immodest to wear less than two veils. Her hands, of course, were always hidden in long gloves. She had been a pretty girl, but nobody had known it.

There had come a man who had an interest in hidden things and wondered how long a time it required for this girl to take off all these clothes. He also wondered what she looked like. The young lady always put on her hat and at least one extra veil when he called. His name was Whiter.

His curiosity became so great that one afternoon, in the presence of the aunt, he had asked if the girl would marry him. She, in response to nods by the aunt, finally said, “Yes.”

After he had left, the girl was horrified by a partial revelation by the aunt of the wicked practices of married people. Not only her face but all of her indecent body would have to be exposed. There were many tears, and both the girl and her aunt went to bed without any supper. The girl had promised to become a bawdy martyr in order that the human race might be continued.

The marriage ceremony was performed, and the girl, dressed in black, became Mrs. Whiter. But, when the man had opened the door of his home to allow her to enter first, the girl had revolted. She could not suffer an exhibition of her obscenities. She ran from the porch. Financed by her aunt, she eventually found her way to Menham. She was still

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Mrs. Whiter, but she had escaped an exposure of the wickedness of her body.

Mrs. Whiter talked with other women and heard other accounts of bodily relations. Her ideas slowly changed, but so slowly that the day she had first gone outdoors with her face exposed Andrew Cline, the only one to recognize her, said merely, “Won’t you get cold without them veils?”

The only remark of men after she had discarded six of her petticoats was, “You’re gettin’ thinner, Mrs. Whiter.”

These immodesties, which she had thought would surely make every man want to rape her and would probably bring a few of them into action, had been in vain. After that Mrs. whiter tried harder to make herself attractive to men. She dispersed with

her gloves and the rest of her petticoats. She went out without a hat and without stockings.

She wanted a man. But she no longer had any physical attraction. Her beauty had remained hidden until it wilted. The path of virtue was the only path available.

"If we could only start life as old women and then get to be girls again we'd be a lot better off," she thought. "We'd look forward to not bein' a virgin instead of livin' in fear that some day we might not be a virgin."

She did not give up her efforts to make some man interested in her body. Lem Witherbee had accepted invitations to eat supper at her house, but he

simply thanked her kindly after the meal was over and went back to his store.

Even when she had exposed most of her bare legs upon lifting her dress to protect her hand in taking a hot pan off the stove, Lem Witherbee had watched without interest in anything but the contents of the pan.

Drinking was a pleasure Mrs. Whiter had always abhorred as a wicked vice, but, having learned that she enjoyed it, she proceeded to make up for lost time. She was also sincere in her insistence that she was watching for burglars when she visited the kegs alone. Burglars never came to her house. Perhaps one would come to the town hall and could be persuaded, under the influence of cider, that her body had not wilted too much.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PAUL TURNER PRESCRIBES AN ABORTIFACIENT

MAY CLINE was very much irritated by the fact that she was going to have a baby. She had been complimented on her increase in size by her mother, who was pleased to have her daughter gain weight and assured May that the extra poundage would soon be circulated about her body in a more proportionate manner.

"What we eat goes into the stomach, you know, and stays there until the body takes it to other places," she said.

Andrew Cline's comment, "Is it goin' to be a boy or a girl?" had been squelched by his wife's reply, "Your evil mind will be askin' next whether Miss Hummer's baby's goin' to have a baby."

May's somnambulations had not been made on the usual regular schedule of late and had recently been discontinued altogether. When nobody else was in sight, she often spoke to Paul Turner, who worked for her father and lived in a room in the rear of the kitchen. He tried to avoid these private interviews.

"You can't say it was me," he would insist before May had a chance to speak. "It's so dark out there in the barn you couldn't tell who it was."

"But it was you, and you've got to do something

about it," she would reply. "You said everything was goin' to be all right."

"And so 'tis," he would answer, "I can prove I been goin' with Minnie Muller all this time."

"But you said you was just goin' with her so they wouldn't suspect us."

"And so I was. I been goin' with her. You don't know who you been goin' with."

May Cline did not want a baby. What would she do with it? It would be like playing with a doll again except that this doll could move and cry whenever it wanted to. She couldn't throw it into a corner and forget about it when she wanted to play something else.

A baby would play with her, rather than she with it. Whenever it screamed she would have to go and see what it wanted, or try to find out what it wanted. A baby could only make noise. It couldn't talk so that she could understand it. She would have to bring silence by experimental offerings of things she thought might be desired. It would be like trying to silence a live and drunken idol that insisted on having a certain sacrifice placed before it but could not remember what it was.

This live doll would be her dictator. Whenever it decided to call her, day or night, she would have to respond. Babies probably cried several times a day just to amuse

themselves by having their mothers run to them.

If she could have had a baby when she was a little girl and liked to play with dolls it would have not

been so bad. She would have enjoyed the live doll part of the time at least. And, being nearer to babyhood herself, she could have understood its whims better. She might have been able to understand what it was talking about. If she had had this baby then, the discomfort she was experiencing now would be over, too.

A baby would have to be fed, and washed and housebroken. It would be a long time before it could do anything for itself. May wished her baby could be a kitten or puppy. A baby of this sort would not require much attention and could soon do everything for itself. By the time a human baby learned to walk the kitten or puppy would be a sophisticated adult.

Perhaps her mother would help her take care of the child. She had had experience and could tell her what to do. Her mother would also suspect her motive for sleepwalking in the past. She could claim her being asleep must have been responsible for the baby, but then, another time, her mother might follow her right into the barn.

One day Paul Turner went out of his way to speak to May alone. He handed her a package from which the label had been removed.

"You take some of this and go to bed," he said. "That'll fix you up."

May went to bed, but she postponed taking the medicine when she heard her mother coming up the stairs. Mrs. Cline saw the package under the bed. She tore off the cover, and her mouth fell open.

"Your father must have gone crazy!" she cried. "What's he doin' leavin' his blastin' powder under your bed? Is he tryin' to blow you into pieces, and me, and the house? Wait'll I get my hands on him."

Mrs. Cline dashed from the room to find Andrew.

CHAPTER XXIX

HENRIETTA, MAN OF ONE WORD

THE first word Henrietta Hummer learned to say soon became known in Menham. Mrs. Jones hurried from Miss Hummer's house to tell Mrs. Sadler the news.

"I went to see Miss Hummer, and her baby called me a slut!" she said.

"Did it say anything else?" asked Mrs. Sadler.

"Prob'ly," replied Mrs. Jones, "but when anyone calls me a slut I don't wait to hear any more. The baby's prob'ly swearin' a blue streak by now."

"Prob'ly," agreed Mrs. Sadler.

"She had the baby all painted up like an Indian, too," continued Mrs. Jones. "She said she'd given it some crayons to play with and it wrote on its face."

"Prob'ly she paints its face instead of washin' it," Mrs. Sadler suggested.

"I guess that's what she does," agreed Mrs. Jones. "And when the baby called me a slut Miss Hummer acted surprised and tried to tell me the baby has an evil mind and says words she's never heard before."

"Well, come in. Tell me some more."

Other women called on Miss Hummer. Henrietta paused in his vocal jumblings to say proudly and

clearly to each, "Slut." Whereupon the visitor left with a gaudy display of indignation.

"She must call Miss Hummer that all the time," the women agreed.

"And think of all the other things she must call her," Mrs. Sadler always added.

The baby's painted face called for considerable theorizing:

"Maybe it ain't paint. Maybe it's her real color."

"Maybe Miss Hummer's too lazy to wash it off."

"Maybe the baby turned out to be a nigger, and she's tryin' to disguise it."

"Maybe she thinks babies are *s'posed* to be painted, same as furniture."

Each visitor felt obliged to give a slightly different version of her encounter with Henrietta, and, as a result, he became accredited with a larger vocabulary.

It had previously been commonly supposed that Miss Hummer did not know even such an evil expression as, "God." How she, the baby's only teacher, had come into this knowledge of profane and obscene remarks was a mystery.

"Perhaps Miss Hummer's always been so aloof and proper because Menham people didn't know enough profanity to suit her," suggested Mrs. Lyman.

“Maybe she thinks she’s teachin’ the baby to pray,” said Mrs. Jones. “And, not knowin’ which are the right words, she’s usin’ all the words of that kind she’s ever heard.”

“Is she teachin’ the baby, or is the baby teachin’ her?” asked Mrs. Whiter.

“If I had a baby I wouldn’t bother teachin’ it to swear,” said Mrs. Sadler. “It’ll swear enough when it’s older anyway.”

“Miss Hummer p’raps wants her baby to be different than others,” said Mrs. Dean. “She keeps it painted and doesn’t teach it nothin’ to say but swear words. P’raps she learned the swear words just so she could teach ’em to the baby.”

Miss Hummer and her eccentric baby became as important a topic for discussion at the women’s sessions in the town hall as were Mrs. Nancy Muller and her daughter at the men’s forum. It became an accepted fact that no-one could pass the Hummer house without having obscene insults shouted at them by the baby. It was becoming an accepted fact that Miss Hummer joined in this shouting and was almost as indecent in her defamations as Henrietta.

John Lyman stopped at Miss Hummer’s house one afternoon to try to sell her some wood. He walked into Lem Witherbee’s store a few minutes later.

“You know, that Hummer baby can’t tell a man from a woman,” he said. “It called me a slut just the same as though it was my wife ‘stead of me it was talkin’ to.”

CHAPTER XXX

NATURE PLAYS A TRICK ON MINNIE MULLER

THE appreciation of Minnie Muller's right to fame and distinction equaling that of her mother was still confined to a very limited circle: John Lyman and Paul Turner.

John Lyman's realization of the full justice due her was the greater, as he knew more of the tradition attached to Mrs. Nancy Muller than Paul. John still intended that Minnie should make a sudden rise from comparative obscurity to become the subject for a new topic and tradition at Lem Witherbee's, but, as yet, he felt that more than one competitor for her hand and body would not be fair to him who was to be her sponsor and deserved a head start on the others.

John and Paul shared Minnie in a gentlemanly manner. There were no offers of duels or fights. Instead, there was a standing appointment that Minnie should be on the town hall steps directly after supper each night. During the winter this place of meeting became the Goodwin farm, a long-deserted abode. The man who arrived first had precedence over the other. The second left politely and returned at a reasonable time, when Minnie was surrendered to him.

Paul had no objection to this arrangement. Andrew Cline might discharge him some day, and John Lyman would be a potential employer. If he opposed the sharing of Minnie, Lyman might connive with Cline to find work for him to do at night. And the gentleman's agreement now practiced provided a means for his leaving Minnie with less delay and needless conversation than in the past.

Usually at least one of the men came to the meeting place. Occasionally neither would put in an appearance, and Minnie would waste much time in waiting that could have been put to more profitable use in her mother's kitchen.

Until her encounter behind the town hall with John Lyman, Minnie had considered intersexual love as a physical compatibility peculiar to individual couples: a mutual conformity in the bodies of the man and the woman involved that made them suited to each other with no alternate choices available to either.

Each man was physically able to love only the one woman whom his body matched, and each woman only the one man for whom her body was built. She had found the man who matched her in Paul Turner, and so considered herself in love with him. All other men were physically unadapted to her.

She thought herself fortunate in locating the proper key to her body so close at hand. She had been afraid the man she was built for might be looking for her in some

other country.

Then came John Lyman, who proved himself

capable of creating the same bodily responses as Paul Turner. Minnie discovered she was doubly fortunate in having two lovers who were built to match her body, and both of whom lived in Menham. As a result, she was in love with two men.

One Saturday night John Lyman's desire for prominence became greater than his desire for Minnie Muller. He had kept her from acclaim long enough. It was time to perform his humanitarian duty and present her to the audience that would substitute her name for her mother's. It was too bad she could not make a personal appearance and verify the things he had to say.

He waited for the proper dramatic moment, the pause that preceded a change in the topic then under discussion. Miss Hummer and her baby would have been introduced as the next subjects for consideration if Lyman had not interrupted the usual program with a startling new text, of which only he could speak authoritatively.

He became the center of the gathering, despite his seat in a corner. All eyes and ears were attentive to him. There were no interruptions. John Lyman was making the most important announcement since the birth of Nancy Muller's baby. He was the pivotal public figure of the moment. He had made history and was relinquishing his rights of conquest in order that others might benefit. He was founding a new school of expression which would have many members by the next Saturday night.

"Minnie Muller's the girl to go walkin' with; she's

a lot better than her ma ever was," he began, arousing unspoken controversy and determined investigators at one and the same time.

He continued with descriptive details that left no grounds for skepticism of his facts, but obviously withholding much of the material available for use at another session when he would meet with rival accounts.

He closed with the words, "Yup, you fellows who went out with her ma are welcome to her. Even if her ma was standin' here just like she was at her best you could still have her. I'm sure glad I had to wait and get Minnie."

Candidates for the new school expressed themselves at once. John Lyman was besieged with questions. Other topics of discussion were forgotten. Minnie Muller had made good.

The old school asserted itself in the voice of Andrew Cline, who insisted, "Nobody could measure up to Nancy Muller. Minnie's prob'ly better'n most, but that's only 'cause she's Nancy's daughter."

Whereupon the older men began a discussion of their own upon the merits of Mrs. Muller. The question period over which John Lyman presided was not disturbed or distracted by this. Lyman, the spokesman and authority of the hour, felt that he should have made Minnie known sooner and come into this prominence with her before.

Minnie was not roused from her bed that night, but she was not kept in ignorance of her popularity much longer. Men put themselves out to speak to

her and pinch her breasts. They asked her to go to the Goodwin farm or to their own barns.

Minnie Muller became aware of a surprising fact. There were more than two men whose bodies were built to match hers. Most of the men in Menham had been constructed in the manner that was compatible with her body. They had been formed in the pattern necessary to be her lover.

She found herself in love with many men. Through some whim of Nature, the mold for her mate had been filled many times. Since they were built to be her lovers, she must treat them with equal affection. There was only one Minnie Muller. She was the only girl they could love, so she must love them all.

John Lyman regretted the fulfilling of his duty toward Minnie. He now had more of Paul Turner’s companionship than Minnie’s, and on the following Saturday night he found difficulty making his presence heard, despite the fact that he was the original authority on the subject at hand.

CHAPTER XXXI

BE KIND TO MICE

ON every possible occasion Mrs. Sadie Sadler expressed a theory that people are reincarnated as mice.

She constantly warned Menham residents not to kill a mouse, as it might be some deceased relative or friend. Mice, she said, must not only be tolerated as household companions but treated generously and kindly. Having become mice, our forebears return to the homes of their descendants expecting a fitting greeting. Only a monster could welcome those responsible for his existence with fiendish mousetraps and poison.

Mrs. Sadler's house was a home for mice. She walked with cautious steps, looking from side to side and taking all precautions not to step on one of them. She fed the mice large meals on the kitchen floor. She would rather have served them on a table, but it seemed much easier for them to eat on the floor. She laid down a cloth to make the eating place seem more attractive, and put the food in china dishes.

Hundreds of mice attended these dinners, which were given every noon and night. They paid no attention to Mrs. Sadler, who watched over them devotedly. At each meal she identified the mice she

thought were her mother and father, but each time she selected different ones. She had discovered all of her dead relatives she had known at these mouse picnics and was always pleased to point them out when requested.

Mice ran about the floors in large numbers. Mrs. Sadler could only sweep when her husband was in the house. The mice noticed his presence and hurried to sheltered places. Jonathan Sadler often amused himself by killing mice. There were many that could not find room in the hiding places. But he never indulged in this pastime in his wife's presence.

Mrs. Sadler had a horror of cats. Cats killed mice. A stray cat might kill some of her ancestors. Any cat that found its way into her yard was soon put to death. She liked to entice neighbors' cats to follow her home and then kill them.

Mrs. Sadler wished she knew more of her genealogy so she could identify more of the mice that lived with her. She was convinced she was being hostess to all of her forefathers, even as far back as Adam and Eve. She could always single out this latter couple to her own satisfaction.

Mrs. Sadler did not speak to Mrs. Muller. Mrs. Muller had suspected as much from the way in which Mrs. Sadler walked away when she started to talk. So Mrs.

Muller stopped speaking to Mrs. Sadler.

The breach had been caused by a visit of Mrs. Muller's to the Sadler farm. Unaware of the relationship between Mrs. Sadler and the mice, Mrs. Muller had seized a broom and started killing these

creatures that were everywhere beneath her feet. Mrs. Sadler's screams had done no good, and over fifty mice were dead or dying by the time she was able to wrest the broom from Mrs. Muller. Mrs. Sadler had burst into tears after the tragedy, and Mrs. Muller had offered to lend her a mousetrap.

Whenever she was awakened at night by mice running over her bed Mrs. Sadler got up to prepare them a lunch. This was their way of letting her know they were hungry.

Mrs. Sadler bought mousetraps at Lem Witherbee's store whenever there were any for sale. She destroyed them as soon as she arrived home. One of her ancestors might call on a neighbor and be caught if some one else bought these insidious devices for execution.

One Saturday night Mrs. Sadler nearly disrupted the women's meeting. A mouse jumped out of the folds of her dress and ran across the floor. Other women jumped and screamed. Mrs. Sadler spent the rest of the evening hunting for the mouse — it looked like her grandfather.

CHAPTER XXXII

ARTHUR MOORE, DEALER IN WOMEN

THE unannounced visits of Arthur Moore to the Goode farm were awaited with equal enthusiasm by both Mrs. Emma Goode and her daughter Alice. They were rivals for his choice and never knew who the lucky one would be the next time he came.

Whenever Moore was seen approaching, each hoped his motive was something other than benevolence. For Arthur had shown himself to have this characteristic, too. He had convinced Mrs. Goode that he was only showing a fatherly interest in her daughter, and had assured Alice that he only discussed business affairs with her mother.

When coming to perform such impersonal kindness in a private conference with one, he could not, on the same visit, show his customary affection for the other. His moods were fixed in either benevolence or passion. Each visit was either to give moral guidance and kindly advice to the one or to enjoy a pleasurable indulgence with the other. On only one occasion had Moore taken both mother and daughter from the kitchen in turn.

Arthur Moore's schedule of appearance and choice was most irregular. Sometimes he would come two

days in succession and select either Emma or Alice both times. He might not come again for a week or a month, or he might be back two days later. His choice might be the same as before, or it might not. He might come during the day, or he might rouse them from bed at night.

Both Emma and Alice had taken to wearing their best clothes seven days a week. Each liked to look her best when before Arthur for inspection, hoping that his mood might change if it was paternal and revert to her. Their housework had to be done in a fastidious manner, and much of it was neglected to protect their dresses.

Arthur Moore would escort, or at least accompany, the lady of his choice — usually to the barn — but he never saw her back to her home. Following his charitable advice, he left without words or ceremony, only walking away faster if asked for some hint as to when he would come again. He had a head start coming down from the hayloft, as his clothes did not require much adjusting, while those of his companion were somewhat ruffled by the hay.

Arthur Moore's manner of greeting was brief. "I've got something to tell you," he would say, adding the name of the one he wanted. She would follow him happily,

while the other would go and change her dress.

Alice Goode's interest in Felix Dole had both increased and decreased. It seemed a waste of time to bother with him, but there must be some way of making him more like Arthur Moore. If Felix could

change his tactics she could be more sure of him than she was of Arthur. She could make definite appointments with Felix and know when she would see him again. And she would not have to wonder whether he would invite her or her mother to accompany him when he came to their house.

Arthur Moore had qualified as one of Minnie Muller's lovers, but had done so principally for social reasons. This made him a full-fledged member of the Minnie as well as the Nancy Muller school of thought at Lem Witherbee's. His taking of Minnie to the Goodwin farm had been an initiation he felt obliged to make to attain this distinction. Otherwise his imagination might be found in error in some intimate detail involved.

He did not consider any woman worthy of the popularity Minnie Muller was enjoying and felt humiliated in having to let her know that he, too, was obliged to make use of her. He thought it degrading to the superiority of man over woman for more than one man to show continued affection for any one girl. He had tried to show as little affection as possible during his encounter with Minnie and had left a scar on her wrist.

Every man should have a number of women at his disposal, Arthur Moore had told his whisky cup. A woman should share one man in common with other women. A woman with a number of admirers had too high an opinion of herself: she was something necessary to as many men. If her male companions returned only a few times it was not quite so bad:

she could conclude she was not good enough to belong to any one man and was only doing her duty to men whose other women were not available at the moment.

Women, as you know, were not held in very high esteem by Arthur Moore. "They're all the same" he said in announcing his membership in the Minnie Muller clan. "Anyone that went out with Nancy knows what Minnie's like. I forgot whether it was Nancy or Minnie until I pushed her hair off her face so I could see."

Arthur Moore pondered these opinions as he walked toward the Goode farm for the first time in two weeks. Perhaps he was showing these ladies too much attention. Each thought she was the one woman in his life at present and that he not only was faithful to her but had so much interest that he was acting as a friendly eunuch to the other.

Each probably thought she had him in her power. One of them would be asking him to marry her or trying to rob him in some other way if he was not careful.

He should correct their opinion of him. He had better let them know that, as an upright man maintaining the dignity of his sex, he had more women at hand than he could ever use. He was doing them a special favor in calling so often when he had so many better women to choose from. He must not let their debasing ideas about him persist.

Arthur Moore knocked at the Goode kitchen door. Emma and Alice stood before him side by side in

expectant readiness. He looked at them without comment. Then he stepped closer and began to pinch and slap in various places each of their bodies in turn, as though examining a pair of horses.

He seemed to be comparing their physical attributes and trying to determine which was the better for his purposes. He felt of corresponding parts of both at the same time and shook his head silently.

In their anxiety to hear who his choice was for today, Emma and Alice remained motionless and indifferent to this unexpected greeting. Which one did he have something to tell?

Arthur Moore stepped back and studied them, with one hand holding his chin and another his elbow. “Well,” he said, as though to himself, “I guess I’ll go over and see Minnie Muller.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

YOU CAN LEAD A HORSE TO BRANDY, TOO

ARTHUR MOORE was not welcomed at the Goode farm for a week, the interval that elapsed until his next visit. Instead of having to use the reconciliatory methods he had planned, he found Emma and Alice waiting with similar tactics to regain his favor. He immediately changed his intended submissive rôle to one of tyranny and interrupted Mrs. Goode's invitation to have tea by telling Alice to come out to the barn.

He went home a short time later thinking about Teresa Brown, a girl in Westham. He also thought of his snakes. He had not seen them since they got tangled up for their winter's slumber. Moore covered their pen with hay when cold weather came. It would soon be time to uncover them. He visited the Goodes several times before the weather permitted the awakening. He shortened his manner of greeting to, "Come, Alice," or, "Come, Emma."

Arthur Moore's spring reunion with his snakes was a happy occasion. He looked forward to the event and saved up choice morsels of food to bring to them. This year he had a newly hatched brood of chickens to give them. He missed the snakes during the winter. After they had been awakened by

the warmer temperature he picked many of them up to receive the intricate embraces of their crawling bodies.

The rattlers enjoyed the chickens and other fresh foods Arthur gave them this spring. In return they provided all the coiling embraces he desired. He did not see the Goodes for over a month after that but visited the snakes daily.

After the revival of the snakes Arthur Moore went to the store to have a few words with his whisky cup. There was a strange horse and buggy outside Lem Witherbee's. He did not approve of this. Somebody he didn't know would be inside. He took an immediate dislike to the man drinking brandy at the bar. He did not like strangers, and he did not approve of brandy as a substitute for whisky.

Moore tried to avoid the visitor. He sat down at a distance from the drinking counter and pushed away nearby empty chairs. Without comment, Lem Witherbee brought his whisky glass filled so that it resembled a cup of tea. The stranger pulled a chair to Moore's side and started to talk.

"Glad to see yuh," he began. "As I was just sayin', it's a nice day for drinkin' and a nice place to drink. Nice brandy, nice store, nice town, nice weather."

Arthur Moore moved restlessly in his chair and looked at Lem Witherbee.

“Have some brandy,” said the stranger. “It’s a lot better’n that stuff you got there.”

Arthur Moore went to another chair. The other

man followed him. Moore emptied his glass and walked to the counter. The man was still beside him and emitting a flow of noisy words. Moore drank another cup of whisky.

“S’pose my horse ud like a drink of brandy?” asked the man.

Moore spoke for the first time, “Yes, he told me when I came in that he was thirsty.” This mission would take the man away from his side.

“I’ll bring Brandy right in for his brandy — that’s my horse’s name, Brandy,” said the man, starting for the door.

Lem Witherbee objected to this proposal. “You better take the drink out to him,” he suggested. “There ain’t room for him to get through the door.”

“I’ll unharness him, and he’ll squeeze through all right,” replied the man.

“No,” Lem remonstrated, “you can’t bring him in here.”

Arthur Moore sat down to enjoy the argument. The stranger might not be such a bad sort. He was all right as long as he was talking to somebody else. And his idea of bringing the horse to the bar was a good one.

Lem’s arguments had no effect. The man insisted that his horse was going to come in for a drink. “He won’t hurt anything, and he’s good company,” the stranger maintained. “I shouldn’t of left him out there all alone in the first place.” Lem followed the man outdoors, and Arthur Moore poured himself an unrecorded glass of whisky.

Lem buckled the harness in place again as the stranger unbuckled it, but the stranger worked faster and was able to lead the horse out of the shafts when the contest ended. Lem went ahead intending to bolt the door, but Arthur Moore was holding it open.

The horse arrived at the bar despite further interference by Lem Witherbee. He announced that he charged double rates for liquor served to horses in the store, but the visitor could not be discouraged. Lem poured a drink of brandy, and the man poured it into the horse’s mouth. The horse did not live up to its name. It threw its head down, shook its body, and backed away.

Arthur Moore was standing beside the horse. A harness buckle struck his whisky glass. He looked at the glass and saw a crack in its side. The stranger and his horse had seriously damaged this priceless receptacle and almost broken it, a felonious offense.

The glass would always bear this terrible scar. It was weakened, disfigured, and more liable to break than before. He would have to protect the honor of his whisky glass. Moore handed the glass to Lem Witherbee and seized the stranger by the arm.

"You and me is goin' for a walk," he stated. In a lower tone he explained to Lem Witherbee, "I'll take him out and let him sober up."

Lem expected more serious consequences. A cracked whisky glass called for more than a walk for the party responsible. He led the horse out the door after them and reharnessed it to the buggy. The

stranger's utterances grew less audible as Moore forced him down the road in the direction of his farm.

An hour later Arthur Moore returned alone. He had a drink from his damaged glass and examined the crack mournfully.

"I came back to get that fellow's buggy," he said.

"Too bad about your glass," condoled Lem. "I tried to keep the horse out. I knew something like that would happen."

"Yeah, damn shame," replied Moore. "I knew the bastard didn't mean to do it, and I just took him outside so he couldn't do any more damage."

Lem eagerly awaited the account that this alibi was introducing.

"We got down the road and a rattlesnake bit him. I tried to pull him away, but he didn't know what he was doin' and tried to pick the snake up. I guess he's dead by now, but if we get him in his buggy the horse'll know where to take him."

"His folks'll know it was a rattler bit him, will they?" asked Lem skeptically.

"Oh, sure. I didn't do nothin' to him. There's only the snake bite."

Lem Witherbee put Arthur Moore's glass back in its place with even more care than usual.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. JONES DISPLAYS HER WINGS

ONCE a year on a warm spring day Mrs. Edna Jones went to the Menham graveyard to eat lunch. She used the Blake family stone as a back rest. Her father's name, the last of the list, had been placed on the stone the day he was christened, "Nathan Manuel Blake 1839—," but the year of his death was not filled in after he died. There had not been room on the stone for her mother's name.

Mrs. Jones did not hold to the theory of Mrs. Sadler that our predecessors become mice. She believed that people remain in the ground where they are buried.

Mrs. Jones liked the quiet atmosphere of the graveyard. There were a number of people there, but none of them could talk aloud. She had a feeling of superiority. Whatever she might say could not be disputed. People whom she had not liked she could call names, or say anything about them that she wished.

Those who were buried had to stay there. She could come or go at will. No matter how much better or more well-to-do than she they may have been once, there was nothing they could do to prove it

now. Her house was a palace compared with theirs, and she was far better than their remains.

Then, too, a periodic visit to the grave of her parents was a duty that should not be neglected. She did not call her father and mother names, but carried on a pleasant monologue summarizing the gossip of the past year. They were probably pleased by her visits. Her presence gave them a certain dignity and superiority. Two of the other graves had small stained statues. During her stay she provided a live and talking statue, one that brought news and could call any of the other graveyard inhabitants any name desired.

Surely this was better than a stone statue. These statues had to stay there, and in silence, while she could go wherever she wanted to and could talk about the merits of her parents if she so desired. She could even break the other statues if she went to the trouble of bringing a sledge-hammer.

Mrs. Jones had considered making a pair of large wings to wear while at the graveyard. The statues had wings, and that might be one point in their favor in comparison with her. But she had always put off making the wings until the day she decided to go to the graveyard, and then it was too late.

Spring had brought warm weather to Menham again, and Mrs. Jones was preparing a lunch to take to her parents' grave. She was interrupted by the tappings

of a spring shower on the windows. She decided to postpone her visit and in the meantime to try her hand at making wings.

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The next day Mrs. Jones walked out of her yard with a lunch basket in one hand and two redesigned sacks decorated with hens' feathers tied to her back. The sacks had been cut and sewed into triangular shapes and given rounded corners by a stuffing of rags. These wings probably would not take her into the air, but neither would those of the stone statues permit them to fly.

Mrs. Jones had difficulty keeping her wings in place as she walked to the graveyard. She had to stop and readjust them several times. The stuffing of rags settled until the wings were drooping at the top and bulging at the bottom, and many of the feathers blew off.

"Y' got quite a load there, Mrs. Jones," said Howard Dean as she passed his farm. "Want any help?"

"Isn't it a nice day," she replied, ignoring his question.

At the graveyard Mrs. Jones was free from further impertinences. Other people only came there for a funeral. She laid her basket on the Blake lot and circled the statues. She displayed her wings to them in a haughty manner with her head raised.

"They can't say your statue hasn't got wings now," she told her parents. "I could teach these other statues to fly if they were alive."

One of the wings slipped down her back. She pulled at the rope attached to it and prevented it from falling to the ground. Then the other wing began to descend.

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"My wings want to take me into the air now, but I'm going to stay here and talk to you, Ma and Pa," she said.

The first wing came loose from the rope that held it.

"I can take my wings off when I want to, too," said Mrs. Jones, picking up the wing and tying it back in place. "I don't have to wear 'em all the time."

The Blake stone, like the others, was thin, flat and oblong, rising into the air for a little over two feet at an angle that deviated noticeably from the vertical. Mrs. Jones sat down in her customary position there after squeezing the wings together so that they acted as a cushion for her back. She began to talk. When she became hungry she reached into the lunch basket.

Her meal was interrupted before she had proceeded far with the year's gossip, and before she had begun to address any one besides Mr. and Mrs. Blake. Another spring shower started pouring from the sky. Mrs. Jones was doubly annoyed. It was not right that she should be humiliated in the presence of her inferiors. They were protected from this rain that was drenching her. They were exhibiting an argument in their own favor.

She would have to bring her visit to an abrupt end, or else sit there and suffer in the rain. This was humiliating. She could come again, but those below would always remember this time when she was driven away.

Mrs. Jones felt like a dignified queen at a formal function who has tripped on her train and fallen

into an awkward sprawl. But she could cause humiliation, too. She untied her wings and walked to the statues. She placed the open end of each sack over the head of one of the images. The rags fell about on the ground, and both statues were left covered.

Mrs. Jones hurried home. She had asserted herself under trying circumstances. In covering the statues with burlap bags she had shown the ready means for retaliation at her disposal and her superior powers.

But the glow of pleasure that this consolation brought became a second dose of humiliation. The bags would protect the images from the rain, and in providing this protection she had shown that her wings were not real.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE VIRGIN MAY

MRS. SUSAN CLINE still insisted that her daughter, May, was gaining weight in a healthful manner, which was true. Andrew Cline made no inference to his wife that May might also be acquiring a child, but he had told his whisky glass several times that he hoped the baby would not be twins. May's hatred for men, babies, and pregnancy had increased with the size of her body.

One afternoon May felt as though the baby were turning somersaults inside her and lay down. Mrs. Cline hurried to her with an indigestion remedy. May wondered whether her mother would be as pleased by the baby as she had by the enlargement of her body. Her mother ought to be even more pleased, May thought. The baby had been the cause of the large stomach and would grow to be much larger after it was born.

For a long time Mrs. Cline had wondered what the proper occasion would be to inform her daughter of the secrets of life and sex. May was a big girl now and ought not be kept in ignorance much longer. As Mrs. Cline sat at May's bedside, she decided that this might be a good time for the revelation. It would divert May's thoughts from her indigestion.

"There is something I've got to tell you," she began. "I s'pose you've wondered how we get babies."

"Yes," replied May. Evidently her mother was going to give her some assistance. Perhaps there was some way of luring a baby out of the body like catching a fish. May did not like this conception of childbirth. Her baby might refuse the bait and keep right on growing inside her.

"Well, before a woman can have a baby she has to sleep with a man," her mother continued.

May did not approve of this. She did not want to sleep with a man. In her present condition this would be quite painful. "Why?" she asked.

"Well, er, you see men and women are made different," Mrs. Cline explained. "A man can't have a child, but he can give a girl a child. She can't have a baby without his help."

"What does he have to do?" May asked, dreading the answer. She didn't want any help from a man. Having a baby must be more complicated than she had realized. She had heard of midwives but not of midhusbands. And suppose Paul Turner wouldn't help her?

“A man, er, well, the man sleeps with the woman, and after that she can have a child,” Mrs. Cline answered, somewhat bewildered.

May felt frightened. There was something her mother was holding back, something terrible, some awful ordeal in store for her. “Doesn’t he do anything but sleep?” she asked, trying to obtain some hint of her fate.

“Why, yes, but, well, that’s what I’m trying to explain. The man does something that isn’t nice, er, oh, you know what they tell about in dirty stories.”

“But I never heard one about how a man helps a girl to have a baby,” May replied.

Mrs. Cline was bewildered. Why had she started telling May these things? She wasn’t old enough yet. May hadn’t heard of dirty stories, and now she would have to tell her about them.

“Well, either at the beginning or the end of a dirty story the man and the girl lay down together,” she began. “Perhaps you’ll see what I mean better if I tell you one. A girl was undressing, and a burglar opened the window—”

“Yes, I’ve heard that one,” said May when Mrs. Cline had finished. Her mother must just be trying to cheer her up and avoid telling what a man would have to do to her before she could get this baby out of her stomach. May’s pains grew worse. She had been awakened by pains in the same region the night before, but then the baby had only been kicking her. Now it was biting, kicking, and scratching all at once.

“Now, when a man sleeps with a girl he does the same thing,” Mrs. Cline continued. “And the girl has a baby just the same way.”

“But the burglar didn’t come back to help her,” said May dubiously. She could not bear the thought of sleeping with a man now. She had heard of women dying in childbirth and was certain this final requisite her mother spoke of would kill her.

“Men are like that,” said Mrs. Cline. “They like

to run away from their babies and let the mothers bring ’em up. They don’t come back and help once they get away. Your father was too lazy to run away, so—”

Mrs. Cline was interrupted. May needed assistance.

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It was a girl. When Mrs. Cline held the baby in her hands she realized the limited scope of her knowledge. She had thought there was only one way to get a baby. Surely no man had ever done this to May. Until just now May had not known how men gave women babies. Her big stomach had been caused by food. Evidently a woman had to be careful of her diet as well as of men.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MISS HUMMER FINDS A ROPE

AFTER the snow had gone Miss Hummer again abandoned her yard to the male coalition and its snake. The warm spring days were lovely weather for snakes, and she was not going to take any unnecessary chances of meeting Henrietta's emissary or any of its progeny.

She did, however, contrive an experiment to determine how active a watch the enemy was keeping in its encampment. It was a great risk and involved a maximum of bravery and courage. This might be just the opportunity the snake had been waiting for to slip through her defenses and twine itself around her. She did not even consider the poison fangs of the black rattler in her thoughts about it. The twisting body of the most harmless snake inspired her capacities for fear and horror to a maximum of effort.

Miss Hummer had to unbolt and open the kitchen door to try her scheme. She first tied a heavy rope securely and tightly about the waist and shoulders of Henrietta. She tied the other end to a leg of the stove, so that if she should lose her grip on it the rope would still be held fast within her fortification. Then she hastily opened the door, pushed Henrietta

and a slack of rope through the opening, and slammed the door behind him.

This dangerous procedure having been accomplished, Miss Hummer clutched the rope and sat down at a window to watch Henrietta. He had been given a long enough leash to permit him to reach the woodshed. If the snake appeared she would yank him back into the kitchen before there was any chance for communication.

If the snake did not appear it might mean either that the enemy had given up the siege or was lying in ambush waiting for her to become a victim of the ruse. Miss Hummer did not think an ambush was likely, for the delay in seeing Henrietta had been so long that the snake would doubtless try to make use of this chance to deliver new messages.

Being outdoors was like visiting a new country for Henrietta. For nearly a year he had been confined in the Hummer fortress. He rose to his feet, made loud noises, gave his version of laughter, and tried to run. He was succeeding well in this latter attempt when he reached the end of the rope and was pulled to the ground. His laughter stopped, and Miss Hummer smiled.

For twenty minutes Henrietta played in the area granted by the rope. He looked at the sky and picked up many objects from the ground, but none of them was a snake.

Miss Hummer was sure he was looking for the snake, yet his search might be a sham. The serpent could be hiding somewhere and whispering secret messages.

Or perhaps the snake did not recognize Henrietta with his rouged face. Miss Hummer had painted him every day and had had to obtain new supplies of cosmetics from the mail order house. Perhaps the male coalition had come to believe that Henrietta was a girl, or perhaps she had already succeeded in making him loathsome even to men.

Henrietta picked a toadstool and held it in his hand as though wondering whether or not to taste it. Miss Hummer smiled at the thought of what a complete and overwhelming victory for her it would be if her disguised prisoner ate this poison while the snake watched from its hiding place unaware that this depraved girl was the man it sought. But the snake might not be watching. And she could not let Henrietta escape. She wanted him in her power.

She unfastened the door and pulled the rope. Henrietta found himself being dragged along the ground on his back. His head struck the step outside the door. He coöperated with Miss Hummer in her efforts to drag him over this obstacle and was pulled into the kitchen on his stomach.

Henrietta got onto his hands and knees but did not stand up. If he had been allowed to walk through the door he would have dropped to this position before coming within range of Miss Hummer. She had him trained in this respect. He still crawled when in her presence.

Miss Hummer untied the rope from the stove but did not untie Henrietta. She liked having him on a leash like this. She could interrupt any move he

started to make merely by tugging on the rope. She struck him light lashes with the loose end. She did not feel like whipping him just then. The rope would make a nice whip, though. She struck Henrietta a little harder. It might be better than the wood she had been using. Henrietta had been graduated to the second pile in the row of sticks. She swung the rope still harder, hard enough so that Henrietta cried. She stood up and struck him.

Miss Hummer became flushed. Her eyes became bright. She felt like whipping Henrietta now, and she had a whip to use that might prove the best thing yet. She sat down and lifted the child into her lap.

Miss Hummer forgot the heavy nature of the rope in her furor. She let it fall with hard slashes. She had not removed Henrietta’s dress. A red splotch appeared through the fabric. It might be rouge, or it might be blood. A rope was best to use on this man in her power, much better than a stick. She would use the sticks for the stove. She swung the rope madly with an expression of wanton delight on her face.

The last lash came with a sigh from Miss Hummer. Then it was quiet. Henrietta had stopped crying. She noticed this when she started to put him back on the floor. She placed him on the table instead. She had a terrible thought of a long snake climbing a tree with its tail coiled in a noose around her neck. She untied the rope from Henrietta and wished she had let him eat the toadstool.

If this rope had caused his escape, the male coalition

could obtain revenge by tying her to a similar leash in a slightly different manner.

Henrietta soon began to cry again. Miss Hummer was so pleased she unconsciously leaned forward with the intention of kissing him. But she checked herself abruptly. She had been on the verge of kissing a man! The horror of this realization replaced her previous fears.

She washed Henrietta's back and looked for bandage. For several days, at least, she would only be able to paint him. She would throw the rope away. The sticks were better after all.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MRS. WHITER MAKES SANDWICHES

WHAT little spare time Minnie Muller now had she spent in front of the town hall waiting for her next lover. When she was available, the legitimate members of the new school at Lem Witherbee's knew she could be found there. During the evening — except on Saturday — this became a congregating spot for men of Menham. Minnie then waited behind the town hall, and in turn the men withdrew from and reentered the discussions at hand.

Lem Witherbee did not approve of this temperance group Minnie had organized. He feared that such teetotalism was having a bad effect on his whisky sales. If the men were not interested in Minnie they might form these gatherings in front of his drinking counter. This abstinence might even be extended to Saturday night.

Some of the men came in for a few drinks on the way home, but what were a few drinks in comparison to those of a whole evening? Lem had suggested that the men do their waiting at his store, but they seemed more interested in trying to be one of the first to reach the town hall.

Lem Witherbee was a member of the old school. Even if eligible, he would not have become an official

member of the new school because of the temperance meetings it sponsored.

During the day Minnie did not have to pass much of the time alone either. She frequently brought her lunch. Farmers had discovered that a period of rest from their labors long enough to make a brief visit to the town hall was often beneficial. These rest periods were scattered throughout the day, so that there was seldom a gathering in front of the hall until after supper.

Minnie Muller was sure other women must be jealous of her body for which so many men had been built. The disparaging looks and vulgar remarks they provided for her benefit indicated a feeling of envy underneath. Most of their husbands did not match them properly. Minnie felt sorry for the women who walked past with their noses pointed toward the sky during her moments of leisure on the town hall steps. Perhaps no male counterpart had been made for them. At any rate, they hadn't been able to find him.

Mrs. Whiter did not try to disguise her envy of Minnie. She always left the door ajar while on sentry duty at the town hall, but none of Minnie's callers could be enticed. when she was able to be alone with Minnie, Mrs. Whiter was very friendly

and usually sat down on the step beside her, cider glass in hand. Minnie had so many admirers that perhaps she could spare just one for her.

Often Mrs. Whiter was sitting on the step alone when a man came. But smiling, fawning, or flattering

did no good. She could gain no more recognition from him than, “Howdy, Mrs. Whiter. Minnie been gone long?”

In the evening Mrs. Whiter became more aggressive. She would bring the men drinks of cider and invite them one at a time to come inside and have more. Those who went in indulged in nothing but the cider. She would pass out sandwiches she had made in the morning and tell jokes she had heard at the women’s meetings. The men would eat and laugh and continue their discussion of the moment. If she lost her balance and fell the man nearest would help her to her feet, but his hands were removed as soon as this duty was performed.

Mrs. Whiter had tried taking a man’s arm and suggesting, “Let’s go for a walk.” The man would only politely help her home and say, “Good night.” Lem Witherbee was enraged by her giving glasses of cider to the men. He regarded such hospitality as deliberate robberies from his cash box.

Mrs. Muller did not hear much that was said about her daughter, but she had an active imagination that kept her abreast of all new accounts. She did not approve of Minnie’s activities. Mrs. Muller did not like to have to do all the housework.

Whenever Mrs. Muller asked Minnie to do something that would call for much delay she was given a slip of paper bearing the words, “I’ll do it Saturday night.” Minnie kept many such messages written in advance. She only had to see Paul Turner on Saturday

nights. He called on her after Mrs. Muller had gone to the town hall for the meeting.

Mrs. Muller had an intuitive resentment of Minnie’s usurping her place at Lem Witherbee’s. She felt that her daughter was depriving her of something else besides her companionship. Nothing in the house was missing. There was very little that would have been worth the bother of stealing. But Mrs. Muller sensed that something was gone.

She could only express her displeasure by repeating the warning, “If you go havin’ a baby you’ll have to take care of it yourself. I won’t help. I brought up one baby, and that’s enough.”

Minnie would make no reply. Her mother would not have heard it anyway.

Sometimes Mrs. Muller would add, “And havin’ a baby ain’t no fun. The laborin’ pains are fun compared with the work that comes after that. And we can’t have two

Mrs. Mullers in the family. You'll have to get a new name if you get a baby. You better stay home more."

Minnie did not take anything Mrs. Muller said very seriously. Her mother couldn't hear her own voice. Perhaps she thought she was saying something altogether different, or perhaps she didn't know she was talking.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PROHIBITION: BIG BUSINESS FOR LOCKSMITHS

PROHIBITION came to Menham, as it did to other parts of the United States, with the passing of the eighteenth amendment. Lem Witherbee learned of the new law when a bulky policeman from Scofield calmly started to rob his store.

He helped himself to a bottle of whisky and a glass and sat down in front of the bar. He poured out drink after drink, ignoring Lem's indignant demands for remuneration. When Lem tried to wrest the bottle from him the officer pushed him away roughly with the reprimand, "What's a matter with you? *I*'m a cop! *I* got a gun!"

The policeman's desires were not confined to whisky.

"Open a can of them sardines, and gimme some crackers!" he demanded. "Hurry up! And put some more of them bottles here on the counter where I can reach 'em!"

Lem Witherbee would have run from the store to get someone to help overpower this burglar, but the officer placed a blackjack on the counter in an authoritative and threatening manner.

"Make it snappy!" he ordered. "And get me some cigars!" Lem did as he was told.

In a short time a billy and a revolver had been placed beside the black jack. All the bottles on the liquor shelf had been opened and put on the counter within reach of the policeman, also the only two boxes of cigars in the store. Every variety of prepared food available had been brought to the officer to be sampled. Cans, boxes, bottles and their contents were scattered about the counter and floor. Lem Witherbee stood at the policeman's side, can opener in hand, acting as waiter and hoping the bandit's eyes or thoughts would not light on the cash box. A command by the policeman accompanied by a glance at one of his three weapons would have obtained even this.

The thirst, appetite, and stomach capacity of the officer seemed unlimited. He kept several glasses lined up before him filled with beverages from different bottles. He munched food from cans and boxes with increasing ravenousness and gulped it down with several swallows from one of the glasses. Lem had been ordered to keep these filled. This guttling was only interrupted when the policeman paused to light a new cigar. The edge of the counter had a fringe of cigars that had been lit and left to smolder out.

Lem Witherbee could not help admiring this magician's ability to make such quantities of food and drink disappear inside him. The bandit had a stomach like a barrel, but he seemed to have eaten enough to fill it many times. Lem sadly reflected the amount the burglar's indulgences would have

brought if he were paying for them. He had lost count in his mental arithmetic shortly after the man had demanded food.

The policeman got up once to stretch and yawn. He walked behind the counter and, by another feat of magic, casually produced the cash box from its hiding place.

"This all you got?" he growled, scowling as he put the money in his pocket.

The officer returned to his seat. The few steps he had taken had had the effect of a constitutional on his appetite. Later he started a brief conversation.

"How about some money?" he began. "I didn't come way out here for nothin'!"

"You've took all my money," answered Lem, starting to tremble.

"You got plenty more tucked away somewhere! What a you say, you gonna make me a proposition, or do I close this joint up?"

Lem had a surge of courage. "You should be payin' me. You're stealin' everything in the store."

The officer laughed. "Wise guy, huh! What kind of a racket do you think you're runnin', havin' a cop pay you? You'd oughta be on the stage!"

The dialogue ended there. The policeman's pride had been hurt. The inference that he should pay for things in the same manner as an ordinary person was a burning insult that he tried to quench with the contents of the glasses. He might have hesitated before accepting a bribe now had it been offered.

The officer had a large nose as well as a large

stomach. The nose was red when he arrived. It grew redder as time passed. Having displayed this organ at a maximum of brilliance, he concealed his weapons about his person and spoke again.

"Get me an ax!" he demanded.

Lem Witherbee provided the ax, and the policeman went to work. He stood up with apparent difficulty and staggered about the store wielding the tool. He slashed the shelves and walls, producing avalanches of cans, bags, bottles, and hardware. He hacked the counters into a pile of broken wood and ruined merchandise. He chopped the floor; he chopped everything on the floor. Lem Witherbee kept out of his way.

He hewed flour and sugar barrels, bags of grain and mash into one thoroughly mixed heap. He broke the chairs and benches into small pieces. Cans were opened with carefully aimed blows of the ax, bottles broken, boxes strewn about the floor, or sent through the holes he had made in the floor. The stove pipe was dissected amid a

shower of soot. The show case provided a shower of glass. The windows were broken, the door smashed through.

Nothing was left in its original position. The policeman swayed about through the ruins, swinging the ax at any articles of merchandise still intact. He came to what had been the drinking counter and put two bottles that had not been broken into his pockets. He chopped aimlessly at the rest of the pile there. Only a keg of nails had escaped destruction. The

officer picked this up and dumped the nails onto the debris.

Lem Witherbee had been struck on the cheek by a piece of flying glass and was swabbing the wound with his handkerchief. The policeman interfered with this by putting one brace of a pair of handcuffs around his wrist and twisting it in a way that brought new wounds. Then the officer made use of his billy. He hit Lem across the forehead.

They walked out of the store, the policeman prodding Lem with the club and supporting himself with his other arm thrown around Lem's shoulders.

There were three counts against Lem Witherbee at the Scofield court: drunkenness, resisting an officer, and carrying concealed weapons. The policeman produced an ax in court which Lem, he said, had had concealed about his person.

"He was so drunk he was tryin' to find the trigger," the officer attested. Before reaching Scofield, he had finished the contents of the bottles brought from the store, so, for lack of evidence, he omitted the charge of keeping and exposing liquor for sale.

The judge interrupted Lem Witherbee's account of the wrecking of his store by advising, "Next time don't carry an ax." He complimented the policeman on his bravery in overcoming such a desperate drunkard. He ordered Lem to pay a heavy fine and placed him on probation.

Lem arrived back at Menham with a lock, a keg, and the announcement that whisky prices had gone up.

CHAPTER XXXIX

TIN CUPS AND A KNOT HOLE

IT might have been easier to build a new store than to rebuild the old one, but Lem Witherbee set to work to restore the original. The memories, sentiments, and traditions based around this shrine and its drinking counter made moving, even to an adjoining site, something of a sacrilege.

The destruction of the drinking counter had been a serious tragedy. Only two whisky glasses were salvaged: Jonathan Sadler's tin cup, which was restored after much bending, and John Lyman's decorative shaving mug, which had a miraculous escape. Parts of most of the others were found. These were given to the owners, who kept them for pocket pieces.

The ruins were carefully examined by the farmers for all fragments. Each broken piece that was found had the effect on the man who claimed it of discovering some part of the body of one's most intimate friend who has been killed in an explosion.

Parts of the cups of dead members of the drinking fraternity were preserved by Lem Witherbee. They might still be able to carry messages to their owners. At any rate, they were all that remained of their most cherished possession. Pieces that could not be identified

were also saved by Lem. Perhaps they could make themselves known on a Saturday night.

Alfred Dole still had the companionship of the cider cup in his barn, but the others were left with only a few bits of glassware for solace. The first Saturday night after the raid was a sad evening. The men all brought tin cups. These receptacles were strangers. There was nothing in common to discuss, no unsettled problems to reconsider, no mutual secret intimacies over which to ponder. The new cups might not prove to be friends. They had each selected an outsider at random in the hope that he could fill the role of a cherished friend.

The men drank and stared in silence. The keg of whisky Lem had brought back from Scofield was not the same as before, or perhaps it was being contaminated by the new cups. The store was different. A new drinking counter had been built and new chairs and benches provided. These things were strangers, too. They had a cold indifference to what was going on. The men shifted in their seats. They could not get into their favorite Saturday night positions. Customary objects on which they fixed their gaze were gone.

The front part of the store was still a mass of debris. The men tried not to look at this, but even the broken stove pipe in the rear told of the horrible manner in which the whisky glasses and their surroundings had been demolished. The usual topics of conversation were ignored. The tin cups

knew nothing of these subjects and could furnish no inspirations for reviving them.

John Lyman and Jonathan Sadler were affected by the melancholy atmosphere. Their cups had had a narrow escape and had not yet recovered from the shock. Later in the evening other men produced pieces of their broken whisky glasses and brief monologues ensued. Most of the bits could still communicate with their owners. The men dipped the pieces in their whisky. Some of them placed a piece of the glass in their tin cups.

Lem Witherbee had barricaded the door and windows of the store with heavy boards. No more policemen or other strangers would be admitted. The door was kept locked from the inside. Customers all had to be identified through a knot hole before they could have entrance.

“There’s a law now that we have to drink with the door locked,” Lem explained.

The women’s drinking quarters in the town hall were similarly secured. The padlock on the outside of the door was snapped into fittings inside when members were there. Mr. and Mrs. Dole placed locks on all doors of their barn. All strangers were shunned. Every one in Menham would have fastened every lock and bolt on his property if a policeman were reported in the vicinity.

The attitude of the farmers toward their new cups became less reserved as subsequent Saturday nights and intermediate visits developed their acquaintance. The cups showed themselves to be friendly and talkative

and quick to catch on to the ways of their predecessors. They possessed an intuitive knowledge of the subject matter of topics discussed by the group and of secrets revealed only to the lost glasses. Probably the pieces of glass that had been introduced to them had passed on much of this information.

It became a common practice to drink with one of these pieces in the cup. In this way a man had two drinking companions when alone.

The friendship of the old glasses when they were intact was not forgotten. The new containers did their best, but whisky did not taste the same from them and became worse as time went on. It was contended that having a piece from the old glass in the cup improved the flavor, but no-one argued that it brought the taste back entirely. But the effect was the same. They should probably be thankful that only the taste had been lost.

John Lyman and Jonathan Sadler could not understand why their cups did not produce the old flavor. They must have sustained some permanent injury when the store was wrecked.

One Saturday night Lem Witherbee brought out the box of unclaimed bits of glass. These were passed among the men and exchanged for trial conversations until all were positively identified. The next day some of the farmers noticed that the new pieces did not match the texture of the others in their pockets. This was attributed to the abstinence from whisky while kept in the box. This discovery provided an excellent reason for coming to the store

at once, and an informal group gathered to soak new pieces of glass in tin cups of whisky.

New supplies of groceries and other products were delivered to the store. Those who came to purchase these things were admitted in the same way as those who came for whisky. Lem looked at them through the knot hole and then unlocked the door.

One day Miss Hummer came to buy some sugar. When Lem Witherbee looked through the knot hole he drew away in pain. She had stuck her finger in his eye. Lem feared another fat policeman was outside. He made no sound. Miss Hummer identified herself by shouting, and Lem unlocked the door with great relief. After she had gone he fitted a piece of window glass into the hole.

CHAPTER XL

PETER AND HIS BAND

PETER BRUSH had not come to Menham for eleven years. The six women in the six houses on the Westham road that used to be his first stops remembered him best. They all had young sons, and all were named Peter. The boys were of the same age and were often confused by their parents.

This addition to the population of Menham had come in a manner that made parturition seem like a contagious disease. Mrs. Jones gave birth to the first Peter. Before this baby had been properly discussed, Mrs. Sadler was taken ill and produced another one. Then, with intervals of but a few days, came Peter Lyman, Peter Dean, Peter Pike, and Peter Hatch.

Other women became worried. Babies were not usually born in such rapid succession. One a year was a high average for Menham. Was this some plague that brought sudden pregnancy? Some new germ perhaps had settled in Menham, capable of giving babies in a few hours. Women went to bed with the fear that they might be awakened by the pains of childbirth. Miss Hummer slept with all her clothes on.

Men were frightened, too. Perhaps the germ could

impregnate them. It would be hard for a man to live down the reputation he would obtain upon giving birth to a child. But, after the sixth Peter, the mysterious germ became inactive, and the baby scare died out.

After the babies became boys they were usually together. They ran about the town and its environs, quite often with somebody chasing them. They preferred running to walking. Their energy was inexhaustible. They liked to break fences and windows.

They flew about Menham like so many birds, running, hiding, reappearing, disappearing. Fields, roads, and woods all offered them equally suitable routes. They were always going somewhere, trying to be many places at the same time. A call of, "Peter," anywhere in the town would bring forth from one to six of them as though by magic.

"One of the Peters done it," was the explanation for all damaged property. No-one of the six could ever be singled out as the guilty party.

Anything unusual that happened outdoors in Menham was attended by them. Private scenes in hidden places were their especial delight. With intuitive knowledge of the exact time to be there, they would be hidden in waiting at such spots, and running would be postponed.

When two events worthy of their audience were scheduled for the same time at different places, the Peters divided into two groups and compared notes after the performances. They could have added interesting facts and details to Menham gossip, but

they did not divulge their secret knowledge to others. In this way they were able to get pieces of cake and pennies for candy by making subtle hints to certain housewives.

The boys had no secret knowledge about Mrs. Whiter, but they paid her flying visits both at the town hall and her home. She kept pies and candy ready for them. Others did not welcome their calls or even the sight of their approach. They felt more at ease when the sextet was running past their property than when it was approaching.

"So long as they keep on runnin' it's all right, but when they stop, you can never tell what they'll be up to," said David Hume. "They'll all be highway robbers as soon as they get a little bigger."

"Or else detectives," replied Alfred Dole. "I expect to find 'em all hidin' under my bed some night."

Mary Cline was about the same age as the boys. They stopped at her house sometimes, but only to get the cake her mother, May, provided. They would say, "Yes," and, "No," to Mary's remarks but refrained from more intimate comments. They ran away again before she could say much.

The Peters talked about Mary when alone. Each insisted she was to be his mistress and that he would desert the band as soon as this had been arranged. Before stopping at the Cline farm each maintained that he would stay there this time and court Mary. But there were always six runners when they left.

Mary wished the boys would come to see her instead of her mother, or that they would call some

time when her mother was not home. They always stayed away when May was not there.

Running past the Cline farm on an occasion when they did not stop, the six boys saw Mary waving to them. Each insisted it was he she was waving to, and each contemplated stopping to further his suit with her. But none waved back, and they all kept on running.

"That was a signal for me to meet her tonight," said Peter Pike.

"It was a signal for me to see her right now," claimed Peter Hatch, "but I'd rather go where we're goin' and see her ma."

CHAPTER XLI

MISS HUMMER WINS THE WAR

HENRIETTA H. H. HUMMER had become tall and very thin, with a scowling countenance, a distorted mouth, and a pronounced limp. He was still a girl to Menham residents, a harmless eccentric girl whom everybody looked at but whose companionship everyone avoided.

John Lyman expressed the attitude of the men toward Henrietta, “Seems good to have a girl idiot for a change. Now the women can’t tell us only men can be that way.”

Arthur Moore had an additional comment, “Women are all idiots anyway.”

Henrietta wore long dresses. His hair was long, too, and covered his shoulders in a mass of snarls. He carried a pocket mirror in his hand and every few minutes made use of this in rubbing more rouge or eyebrow pencil on his face.

He applied these colors abundantly and in peculiar patterns. Sometimes the black would predominate: black circles around his eyes,’ a black forehead, black nose, black lips and chin, and black cheeks with trimmings of red. Other times the red would be substituted with black trimmings. And sometimes the two colors would be used in more equal amounts,

one black cheek, one red, a black nose, red forehead, black chin, red eyebrows, one red lip and a black one.

Henrietta carried a powder puff and perfume atomizer which he used both on himself and others. He liked to come up quietly behind a woman and spray her neck with perfume. He daubed the powder puff on men when they were within reach. Bystanders would coöperate with Henrietta in holding a victim’s attention while he stole up from the rear. All of which caused amusement for Menham.

Miss Hummer delighted in letting Henrietta walk about Menham, using his vile cosmetics wherever he happened to be and with no more concern than though he were alone. No evidence of bodily corruption could be more vulgar and convincing than this. Although too young to be a whore, he was already a street walker unable to find customers.

Henrietta was exhibiting Miss Hummer’s victory in the war with the male conspiracy. She had not only eluded the snares of men to seduce and corrupt her, but she had turned one of their sex into a depraved woman. Men still thought Henrietta was a girl, and every one shunned him except for purposes of ridicule.

Henrietta played his part well, contaminating other men with powder. Such immoral advances alone were full proof of his female sex. And the filthy powder he put on men was a stigma that added to their repulsiveness. Miss Hummer was not so heartily in favor of Henrietta's perfuming of women. This might arouse suspicion. Still, she did not like

these women, and his attacks with foul perfume offered satisfying revenge for her to chuckle over.

As soon as he entered Miss Hummer's house Henrietta dropped to his hands and knees. If he met her when out walking he did likewise. He crawled with the aptitude of an animal that uses all four legs as such. Miss Hummer kept him fastened to a leg of the stove on a leash when he was indoors. She had a fear of this man in dresses despite his trained submission to her. She was the victor in the war with men, but there might be a revolution. Henrietta might discover his real sex and turn on her with the lust that this information would bring.

In her victory over the male coalition Miss Hummer had retaken her yard from the enemy. There had been no further evidence of a snake. The hostile forces had been completely outwitted. Her piles of sticks had been reduced to three: large clubs for use in emergency, a smaller size to correspond with Henrietta's next indication of growth, and the size now employed.

Henrietta responded to his whippings with loud wails. He made no opposition, accepting the blows as part of the scheme of life. Miss Hummer could no longer take him in her lap. She stood above him, while he remained motionless on his hands and knees. His moans could be heard at other farms but were accepted as another of Henrietta's peculiarities. Probably he was calling for food.

Henrietta's interest in the English language had stopped with the learning of the word "slut". He

knew a few other words, but he said, "Slut," with a pride of accomplishment. People still acknowledged him when he said this. It was a word that attracted attention to him and brought responses from others. It was evidently a universal greeting of some sort.

Men laughed in reply when he greeted them with this conception of, "How do you do." Women spoke back or lifted their heads. These were their ways of saying, "Howdy," in answer.

There was one woman citizen of Menham who did not pretend to resent Henrietta's favorite word. Mrs. Whiter laughed in an embarrassed way and acted as though he had paid her an undeserved compliment when he greeted her with it.

Miss Hummer did not enjoy the reputation Henrietta's greeting had given her. She had to take the blame for his vocabulary. Tradition maintained that Henrietta knew other words of this sort. Miss Hummer thought that perhaps he did have this knowledge and was afraid to use the other words in her presence. She was blamed for something she had nothing to do with. It was not her fault if men were born with minds full of obscenity and profanity. But she could not escape the disgrace Henrietta caused her without making his male sex known. At any rate, in his garb of a woman he was bringing still more disgrace upon himself by using these words people accused him of.

Henrietta mumbled to himself and others in a language of his own that was translated to suit the theory of the listener.

His monologues to inanimate objects no longer worried Miss Hummer. If his utterings were understood, they were also ineffective. If he was trying to enlist other powers for assistance in an uprising against her, he was having poor success.

A tree out of sight of Miss Hummer's house was Henrietta's most intimate companion. He liked to stop there when he went for a walk. He talked to the tree and made red and black marks on its bark. The tree rustled its branches in friendly response. On a windy day when the tree was especially talkative Henrietta would sit down there and go no further.

Sitting there silently one day listening to the tree, he was greeted by a black snake that crawled from behind the trunk. It was a harmless milk adder, and not a rattler, but it recalled a pleasant sensation to Henrietta's mind. Here was another friend.

The snake had not noticed Henrietta, who put a hand around its body when it came within reach. He drew the snake into his lap, accepting its wigglings and writhings as a form of friendly embrace. He stroked the serpent gently and mumbled to it. The adder seemed to understand Henrietta's words of affection mingled with the swishing introduction made by the tree. It ceased its resistance and crawled over his lap and body. Henrietta laughed happily.

Arthur Moore happened to walk by just then. He saw the adder and seized it from Henrietta's grasp. This would be a tasty bit for his rattlers. He

forced the snake into a small bag he used to carry such foods that he happened upon and went his way.

Henrietta looked at the tree, but it could do nothing to rescue the snake. Its branches only produced a dreary dirge that told Henrietta, "We were lucky that he didn't take one of us instead."

CHAPTER XLII

BABIES

FROM all outward appearances, the initiation of members into the cider-drinking sorority consisted of giving birth to a child. This organization had enrolled three new members since its inception: May Cline, Alice Goode, and Minnie Muller. Each had had a baby daughter before attending her first meeting.

Mrs. Cline's explanation of the dietetic cause of her daughter's child was amusing but not convincing to others. May Cline offered no further explanation and insisted her mother's theorem was right. The theories that had resulted as to possible fathers amused Mrs. Cline, for she was sure May could never have been a party to the usual practice for begetting children. They amused May because Paul Turner was not even mentioned.

Mrs. Emma Goode had no unusual theories about her daughter Alice's baby. Arthur Moore had been guilty of an atrocious pun in convincing her he was only showing a fatherly interest in Alice. To have a pregnant daughter as evidence of the unfaithfulness of the man she thought was her private lover had been a displeasing revelation for Mrs. Goode. She had hoped Felix Dole was the party responsible,

but Alice confided in her that Arthur Moore was the only man involved.

With intuitive foresight, Moore remained away from the Goode farm after this confession, and the two women were left without a lover. Alice named the child Blanche, and gossip took its course.

Minnie Muller's baby had been a long-prophesied event. When it finally showed evidence Menham women breathed sighs of relief. This girl who had captivated their husbands was not to escape the discomforts of childbearing. Only two did not approve of this: Mrs. Nancy Muller and her daughter Minnie.

Mrs. Muller had insisted that Minnie change her name, but Minnie did not see how this would help matters. The outcome was that Mrs. Muller called her daughter Mrs. Black, while everyone else in Menham called her Minnie Muller. The baby was named Elsie.

Minnie did not return to her standing appointment at the town hall for several months following the birth of the child. The baby required too constant attention to permit her to spend much time away from home, even though so many lovers had been built to match her body. These men called at her house on occasion and took her for short walks despite interference by Mrs. Muller, who always insisted, "Mrs. Black is busy."

Minnie Muller's maternity had been a crowning achievement for the new school of expression at Lem Witherbee's store. Until then the old school had

had the strong point in its favor of having created this girl who refused to be made fertile by the attentions of the new school. The baby brought out the fallacy in the charges of impotency that until then had been directed against the new school members.

The long-awaited discussions as to whom the child would most resemble began on the Saturday night following the birth. All new school members came in for a full share of alleged paternity, this despite the fact that none of the men had seen the baby. The old school provided a counterdiscourse, using the conventional topic of whom their child Minnie looked most like.

The elated new school outnumbered the others and was not distracted by their conflicting theme. This new subject was to be a definite part of Saturday night discussions from now on. Arthur Moore found himself in glory when both groups in turn discussed his resemblance to the children in question.

Felix Dole had become a member of the drinking fraternity but not of the new school. He had never been able to get up sufficient courage to more than say, "Howdy," to Minnie Muller, much as he would like to have done more. This fact was overlooked by his drinking companions, who read his features into those of the baby with the same careful analysis given the legitimate members.

This both irritated and pleased Felix. He did not like to accept credit he did not deserve, but the charge of parentage showed that the other men at

least thought he was capable of fatherhood. Felix had never waited in line for Minnie's attentions, but the other men insisted she had been seeing him at other times.

Minnie Muller's baby had not been of particular concern to Felix, but he had been annoyed by Alice Goode's offspring. Until its delivery he had thought Alice was his girl, despite their lack of intimacy. Then one night he called for her and was greeted by the roar of a howling baby.

"Yes, it's mine," Alice told him. "It almost drove me crazy while it was inside, and now that it's out it's starting right in where it left off."

Felix continued to visit Alice Goode, but his courage was not increased by her proof of lost virginity. He took no steps toward instigating another baby, for which she was both glad and sorry. She did not want another baby. Arthur Moore turned his attentions to May Cline, and Paul Turner continued to call on Minnie Muller. The babies grew into childhood with Blanche Goode and Elsie Muller a little younger and Mary Cline a little older than the six Peters.

CHAPTER XLIII

ARTHUR MOORE DIAGNOSES HIS DAUGHTER

THE affair that developed between Arthur Moore and May Cline was merely another expression of a biological necessity as far as he was concerned.

He enjoyed his walks with her but would have preferred to be able to forego these pleasures. Women were the only laxative for a third form of bodily poison of which his system had to be cleaned. Affection was as far removed from the relation as from relations with his privy. Being forced to depend on women for this former function was a degradation to the male sex in Arthur Moore's opinion. The female sex could not be degraded any further, he thought.

Women held men in their power through providing living latrines whose friendship men must cultivate as a necessity to health and comfort. Moore's contempt for women increased as he approached sterility. He looked forward to this state. When his body became capable of living happily without recourse to women he could act differently toward them. He could let them know that his memories of their sex were not among his pleasantest.

Babies, even his own, as offsprings of women were also held in low esteem by Moore. True, he had

been born himself, but the event was something over which he had no control. It was not a state he had accepted voluntarily, and he was within his rights in being contemptuous of it. 'Whenever he saw a baby he thought of his snakes. Some day he would like to include a newly born baby with the toads, frogs, and other reptiles he fed them.

May Cline attributed Arthur Moore's silence in her presence to bashfulness. A man can be bashful with words, she thought, while at the same time very aggressive in conduct. She was pleased by his bashfulness and equally glad that it did not extend beyond the use of words. Paul Turner had lacked this fear of words and ridiculed the fact that he was the father of her child. She thought Arthur Moore would marry her in case of another baby.

Moore called on May at unannounced times, just as he had on the Goodes. During the child's baby-hood he was often irritated by having to wait until she finished tending to it. Then he would lead the way to a stretch of woods near her house. May would talk about Mary's latest feats, and Moore would wish women were born without tongues.

Mrs. Susan Cline was not in favor of these walks, but she tolerated them as daytime substitutes for May's former somnambulations. Mrs. Cline no longer had to lead the way downstairs for the sleepwalker and was pleased at this change in events.

Her daughter assured her that she and Arthur only picked flowers on their walks together, and May always brought back a bouquet as proof. In the

winter, she explained, she helped Moore with his housework. Her mother could not understand this, for the household tasks at the Cline farm were numerous enough without deliberately going out to find more.

Mrs. Goode, on the contrary, assumed that her daughter Alice was enjoying herself with Felix Dole. She felt a distinct resentment toward Alice for having frightened Arthur Moore away with her baby. If Alice had stuck to Felix, Mrs. Goode probably still would have had Arthur Moore. She felt that the just thing for Alice to do would be to share Felix with her as Moore had been shared, but Alice evidently did not think so.

Arthur Moore avoided Blanche Goode as well as her mother and grandmother. One day Blanche surprised him by appearing at May Cline's when he called. She was playing with Mary.

"H'lo," she said. "My ma tells me you're my father."

"Your ma's a liar," Moore replied angrily. The depths to which a woman could go to slander a man were bottomless. Why had Alice told this child who her father was? Arthur restrained himself from slapping Blanche's face.

"My ma ain't no liar," Blanche responded, "but she said you'd be a liar if you tried to say you weren't my father." Moore slapped her face. "Call me a liar, will you?" he challenged.

"Well, she ought to know who my father is," Blanche sobbed.

"She don't seem to. You tell your ma she's crazy."

May Cline appeared on the scene at this point, and Moore led the way toward the woods. He broke his usual silence after they had gone a short distance.

"I think that girl of Alice Goode's is loony," he said.

CHAPTER XLIV

MRS. WHITER POURS

AFTER PROHIBITION had brought its poorer grade of liquor for the men, Menham women conceived a new type of fair, much to the chagrin of Lem Witherbee. It was decided to raise money for more kegs and locks by selling cider one evening. The men arrived at the town hall in a body on the night set — all except the storekeeper. He could not be a sponsor of such rapacious rivalry.

This was the first drinking the two groups had done together. Mrs. Whiter was much pleased by the response of the men to the occasion. She made a valiant effort to do all the serving and was so concerned with the well-being of the men that she usually forgot to collect any money.

Arthur Moore did not enjoy the presence of the Goodes, but he did enjoy the cider. May Cline kept one glass filled for him and Mrs. Whiter another. He soon became acquainted with both receptacles, as did the other men with their strange drinking glasses.

Infused with community spirit, Mr. and Mrs. Dole had deserted the cider kegs in their barn for the evening to join the others in patronizing this worthy cause of the ladies' drinking sorority. Alfred Dole

was ready for conversation when he arrived. The other men could only furnish an audience until Mrs. Whiter had accomplished the miracle of turning their glasses into informers.

Alfred Dole had brought his own glass, having been in the midst of a very interesting conversation when he left his barn. He continued the discussion and sipped a last drink of his own stock on the way to the town hall, arriving in time to have the glass refilled before it was empty.

"There's nothin' will annoy my glass so much as to get empty when we're talkin'," he told Mrs. Whiter. "It's likely to shut up like a cup of tea if, I don't keep it filled."

"You needn't worry about its gettin' empty while I'm around," she replied. "I'll keep it talkin' so much you won't be able to get a word in."

David Hume had accompanied his mother to the drinking place, and, in gentlemanly manner, carried her broom for her. Mrs. Sarah Hume had adopted this household comrade as her drinking companion and always took it with her to the town hall. David's belief that she used this device for flying about the countryside in

her capacity of a witch had been communicated to others during alcoholic intimacies and come to be an accepted fact.

As long as he carried the broom, Hume believed his mother would be unable to use it to get into the sky and frighten him. He realized that the broom might take him into the air instead as he walked along with it, but this did not terrify him so much

as the thought of seeing his mother dash into the air and swoop down on him from overhead. When exercising herself in this manner of witches she would probably forget that he was her son.

Mrs. Hume smoked her pipe and talked to the broom when she drank, just as she did at home. She often listened to others but had very little to say to them in reply. The broom served as a support as well as a companion for the homeward trek. She would have preferred to have the broom carry her through the air to her bed, but she had not yet learned of this power with which she was credited.

Most of the conventional drinking topics of the men had to be considerably abridged because of the presence of the women. Women found the presence of the men a similar handicap. Miss Hummer and Lem Witherbee, the only absentees, furnished the only subjects that could be discussed safely. Conversations started around such abstract questions as the weather.

Jonathan Sadler introduced the equally familiar theme of Miss Hummer and daughter. He started in a customary manner, “I saw Henrietta Hummer this afternoon, and she called me a—” He stopped in confusion, recalling the presence of the ladies.

Both drinking sects had enlarged their own vocabularies of profane adjectives and exclamations in thinking up new expressions with which to quote Henrietta, but to compare notes was embarrassing.

“I know,” said Mrs. Cline, “she’s called me that, too. Isn’t it awful the things that child says?”

Sadler wondered which quotation he would have made if he had continued his remark.

“All she can say is swear words,” said Mrs. Jones. “I’ve never heard her say anything else. We’ll have to admit Miss Hummer is original, only teachin’ her child words like that.”

“Miss Hummer knows a lot more than we used to give her credit for,” commented Andrew Cline. “She must of been quite a girl in her day.”

This censorship of the subject was not satisfying. The Hummer discourse was ordinarily a battle of wits to see who could think up the most impressive invectives.

Arthur Moore was about to take May Cline for a short walk, but he reconsidered. This would be even less advisable than making use of her right here in the hall before all the gathering. His absence would give the others a chance to name him definitely as the father of Miss Hummer's child and Mary Cline, and to think of him as the father of the six Peters, Blanche Goode, and even Elsie Muller. There were other things, too, they might talk about regarding him. Moore crossed his legs and shifted in his chair.

A mouse ran across the floor. Mrs. Sadler and Arthur Moore both rushed after it from force of habit. With practiced agility, Moore pinned the animal into a corner with his foot and reached down to pick it up.

"Give it to me " cried Mrs. Sadler. "That's my' great-great-grandmother. Don't hurt her!"

Mrs. Sadler's theory of reincarnation was well

known, and the laughter was not as loud as might be supposed.

"You mean great-great-grandfather, don't you?" asked Moore, examining the mouse.

"Perhaps," admitted Mrs. Sadler. "They tell me he used to like cider. Anyway, let me have it."

Moore could think of no reason to give why he should want a mouse, so he handed it to Mrs. Sadler regretfully. This would have been a nice appetizer for one of his snakes.

"That reminds me, I've got half a dozen mice home that I've been saving for you," said Mrs. Pike.

"That's fine. I'll take this one home now and stop for the others when I go by your house." Mrs. Sadler left with her ancestor.

Conversation became less reserved as the evening continued, but did not reach its customary standard. Nobody acknowledged Mrs. Whiter's repeated suggestions that the two groups meet in this manner each week, nor did any of the men mean it when they agreed to accept her invitation to call.

CHAPTER XLV

PROLIFIC PETER

THE six Peters started their day's running. Peter Sadler ran from his empty breakfast dishes to the house of Peter Jones, who raced him to Peter Dean's residence. There the band was augmented by the arrival in a sprint of Peters Lyman, Hatch, and Pike. The six boys disappeared in a clump of trees bordering the road.

They appeared at the Goode farm suddenly and silently as though out of thin air. They dashed into the barn and disappeared to watch for Blanche Goode's appearance. Blanche was a second favorite of each Peter for his mistress in the event that he did not succeed with Mary Cline. Individual courtships were always put off until the next day, but the band as a group kept in close touch with these girls as well as Elsie Muller, each boy's third choice.

Blanche came out to the barn with swill for the pig, timing her arrival to correspond accurately with the hiding of the Peters. She had never tested the boys to see how long they would wait for her entrance in the morning. She emptied the orts and looked about her. The guests remained quiet and hidden, but Blanche was fully aware that she was being carefully studied by them.

She sat down on the grain box, smiled, and made faces. She liked to have the Peters call on her but would have preferred having them come out and play. She swung her legs so that her heels struck the grain box with loud bangs. There were bangs of greeting from various parts of the barn in response, and six running boys raced past her out of the door.

"Hello, Peter," shouted Blanche, as though surprised by their presence.

There was no reply. The runners soon disappeared again behind trees, and Blanche returned to the house with her swill bucket. Some day she hoped one or more of the Peters would stay behind with her after this morning visit.

Henrietta Hummer was the next host. Each boy hoped he would not have to select her for his mistress, but each believed that she would be the only choice for one of them, and that two of them would be left without girls when mistresses were finally apportioned. They had not yet discovered any flaws in the theory of monogamy.

The Peters watched Henrietta go from the house to the woodshed to bring in an armful of sticks. When he had loaded his arms to their capacity, Henrietta suddenly found six monsters surrounding him and uttering appropriate yells. They liked the way Henrietta dropped the wood and ran in fright each morning. He did not run

toward the house, and they chased him for a short distance to hear his weird cries of alarm.

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Miss Hummer enjoyed this part of the Peters' daily program. She saw to it that Henrietta went to the woodshed at the proper time each morning and watched from the window as he ran screaming in terror across the Hume meadow. Henrietta's scare was especially pleasing to her since it was caused by men. These six Peters thought they were tormenting a girl, not one of their own sex.

The boys raced back to the Dole farm. Locks on the barn prevented their running inside as had been their habit before prohibition. But they stopped long enough to look through knot holes and cracks to make sure Mr. and Mrs. Dole were starting their day's cider menu. Felix and Mary Dole now carried on all the work at the farm, but their activities did not often interest the Peters.

They galloped to Mrs. Whiter's abode, where she was waiting to give them their first cake of the day. They hurried away, cake in hand, for two figures were walking toward the deserted Goodwin farm. The boys were in their hiding places when David Hume and Minnie Muller arrived.

They ate their cake and took mental notes on the proper way to handle a mistress. The Peters were calling on Elsie Muller when Minnie arrived home. Elsie was playing with a doll in her yard, and the boys were watching her from the barn. They ran from their hiding places and were given an apple pie by Minnie. Elsie would have liked a piece of the pie, too, but she realized any suggestion she made that they cut it in seven pieces would be ignored.

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The boys hastened away as though they had been unaware of her existence.

They stopped next to listen to Mrs. Sarah Hume talk to her broom. They had long intended to spend a whole day there to see her take to the air on this vehicle, but there had always been too much else to do for this to be accomplished. Mrs. Hume was calling the broom Jack and insisting she did not like it and that it might just as well stop making advances to her. Then she called it by a different name in a different tone and asked why it had stayed away so long.

The Peters raced on past the town hall and store to Arthur Moore's farm. He appeared from behind the barn and chased them, rehearsing expressions with which he would quote Henrietta Hummer on the next Saturday night. They laughed and tipped over a wheelbarrow full of apples as they shot past.

Mary Cline was waiting at the next farm and sighted them before they could go into hiding.

"Hello," she said, "want to play tag?" Mary hoped that some day one of them would answer, "Yes." Each Peter was sure that the next time they came there he

would say, “Yes.” There was no reply today. The boys ran to the back door, took the cookies May Cline had for them, and disappeared.

This cursory review of Menham and the four girls it was providing to be their mistresses having been accomplished, the six Peters sprinted back to their own end of the town. The intuitive mechanisms that told them when to be at certain places were informing

them that something was worthy of their attention. They dashed past their six houses and continued along the Westham road.

They saw a strange man walking toward them with a pack on his back and went into hiding. The man stopped opposite the hiding places. He hesitated a moment and then removed his pack and sat down on it. He appeared nervous rather than tired. Letters on the bag spelled “Peter Brush.”

Strangers always interested the Peters. They watched this one intently. Since he did nothing except stand up and sit down again several times, they came out of their hiding places to see him closer to. Peter Brush shuddered at the sight of these six boys. They were in the pattern of a mental picture that had been troubling him.

“Hello,” he said. “What are your names?”

“Peter,” answered one of them.

Peter Brush shuddered again. “And the rest of you?” he asked.

“We’re all Peter,” he was told.

The peddler felt weak and white. “Have your mothers all got cow’s head weather vanes on their barns?” he asked.

“Yes,” they answered in unison. “How did you know?”

“I guess I’m on the wrong road,” said Peter Brush. He picked up his pack and walked with a rapid stride back toward Westham. The six other Peters followed him for nearly a mile, much to his embarrassment.

CHAPTER XLVI

OMNIPOTENCE

HENRIETTA HUMMER did not know what suicide was. Otherwise he might have investigated its merits. Or he might not have. Life is a peculiar property with qualities of an expert salesman. It thrusts itself upon us and convinces us to keep it even when we might be far better off without it. Perhaps our ego is horrified by the thought of nonentity.

Henrietta had few thoughts of the future. He had few thoughts of any kind except those based around a fear of a woman who struck him with a piece of kindling wood and smiled. She was the goddess of Henrietta's universe. Resistance would be dangerous heresy. The pains of life cannot be eliminated. His fear of Miss Hummer was a terror of life, this state in which he was a captive of a body that was a captive of this goddess.

To walk about Menham alone was considered a great privilege and pleasure by Henrietta. He might have tried to escape from Miss Hummer during one of these periods of freedom, but he regarded her powers as omnipotent. He believed she could see him wherever he was and that he was just as much in her power whether or not he could see her. He

stayed away as long as he dared but always ended his walks at her residence.

Henrietta began his walks by running until out of sight of Miss Hummer's house. Even though she had just as much control over him then, he felt more secure if he could not see her. The invisible powers of his goddess had been proven in Miss Hummer's absence by body pains such as stomach, ear, and teeth aches. Henrietta accepted these as the blows of a club she wielded that he could not see. All pain was caused by Miss Hummer.

Henrietta did not stop after leaving Miss Hummer's house behind until he came to his friend the tree. His back and buttocks were sore on this occasion and his limp more pronounced than usual. He mumbled to the tree and put more paint on his face. Cosmetics had been his principal toys. They furnished a diversion for which he was grateful to Miss Hummer.

"Put some black on your forehead and chin," the swishing of the tree's branches told him.

"All right," Henrietta's jargon told the tree.

"You're lucky to have nice paint like that," said the tree, "and to be able to use it. Even if I had any paint I couldn't put it on me."

“You can have some of mine,” offered Henrietta, “and I’ll put it on you.” He rubbed rouge and lip stick on the bark.

“Thank you,” said the tree. “I wish I could go for a walk with you now, but I can’t move from here.”

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“That’s too bad,” replied Henrietta. “But, then, you don’t have to be whipped every day like I do. I’d like to change places with you.”

“Too bad that woman who rules us couldn’t change places with me,” suggested the tree.

Henrietta powdered the tree and squirted perfume on it from his atomizer. He continued on his way, promising to visit the tree again when he returned. A short distance down the road he met Mrs. Anna Lyman, who was coming home from the store.

“Slut,” said Henrietta, using his most friendly tone.

“Bastard!” replied Mrs. Lyman, turning her head away.

Henrietta laughed happily. This woman had spoken to him. He ran toward her, squeezing the bulb of his atomizer. Mrs. Lyman pushed him away roughly.

Further on he met Elsie Muller playing in the road.

“Hello,” she said.

“Slut,” responded Henrietta. He squeezed perfume on her, and Elsie laughed. He would have put paint on her face, too, but Minnie Muller sighted him and called her daughter.

“Get away from here,” she told Henrietta.

“Slut,” said Henrietta cheerfully.

At Lem Witherbee’s store Henrietta sat down on the steps. He could spend the afternoon here among friendly people. They would speak and shout to him. He would speak to them and show his friendliness by letting them share his perfume and powder.

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He heard sounds of chopping in the distance. Miss Hummer was probably beating someone else.

Mary Cline came to the store on an errand. Henrietta asked her to sit down with him, but she thought he was trying to frighten her by making funny noises.

“You can’t scare me,” she said, but she hurried to the door without stopping to let Henrietta make further attempts. Lem Witherbee opened the door after examining her through the glazed knot hole.

Mary left by the back door. Henrietta watched her walk down the road. He would like to have played with her. He felt a very pleasant sensation and wondered if she would hit him if he should follow her. He wished he could paint her face, paint her

bare legs, paint her whole body from head to foot. He would like to have had her paint him. He wished they could both be alone and naked, painting red and black designs on each other.

"Slut," he muttered, meaning the term as one of endearment. Henrietta remained seated. Mary had too long a head start now for him to overtake her conveniently.

Other people came and went. They listened to what Henrietta had to say to them. The men laughed. The women walked away with pretended indignation. They believed their translations of his mumblings, which they would quote with additions on Saturday night, were correct.

Late in the afternoon Henrietta applied more rouge to his cheeks and started back toward Miss Hummer's house. He would stop and see the tree

again on the way. He looked for its branches in the distance. They did not appear at the usual place.

When he neared the home of the tree he saw a dazzling white stump where his friend had stood. The tree lay on the ground. David Hume had cut it down to widen the road and was chopping off its branches with a shiny ax.

Henrietta sobbed loudly. He wished the last words of the tree to him could have been realized and Miss Hummer could have changed places with it. Perhaps this punishment had come to the tree for having had such a thought about the tyrant.

He did not think of the loss of the tree in terms of death, but rather in terms of extended torture. Its body had been cut off. Next it would be sawed into logs, then split and chopped into small pieces. Every part of it would be dissected. Later the many parts would be burned and turned into flames and ashes. The tree, Henrietta assumed, would feel all this.

Miss Hummer bought wood from David Hume. Some of the pieces of this friend would probably be used for Henrietta's whippings. Henrietta wondered how much longer he could be so fortunate as to escape with only the pains of an intact body.

CHAPTER XLVII

HENRIETTA CONGRATULATES HIMSELF

MISS HUMMER was glad Henrietta's intellect had been retarded. Otherwise he might have been able to discover his male sex for himself. As it was, he would not understand even if someone were to explain to him the difference between men and women.

Miss Hummer had a feeling of pride in the realization that she had probably been responsible for this reformative alteration in a being who had been born a member of the male society for the promotion of wickedness. Instead of devoting his life to raping women in the manner of his sex, he had become a harmless simpleton who everyone thought was a girl.

She had a dread that Henrietta might expose himself on some occasion and reveal his real sex to others. To have it known that she had been living with a man would be a scandal that would detract considerably from her victory over the male coalition, even though Henrietta would remain her prisoner. Menham citizens could never be convinced that she had always kept him locked out of her bedroom.

If Henrietta's sex was ever discovered Miss Hummer hoped it would come as a result of some man's trying to rape him. For a normal man to find that

he had been attempting to practice his trade on one of his own sex would be such a good joke and such an overwhelming victory for her side that the satisfaction would overbalance the resulting scandal built around her.

While gloating in her accomplishment, Miss Hummer wished the reformation of Henrietta had not been quite so complete. He could do many things for her if he understood just a little more about his environment. She would have taken great delight in having him do the housework and obey whatever orders she might issue.

To be waited on by a man-prisoner would be mastery indeed. After he had learned to cook, sew, and keep house, she could teach him to raise crops, chop wood, and wash clothes. The only useful thing she had been able to teach him so far was to go out to the woodshed for sticks.

Miss Hummer resented having to wait on Henrietta as much as she did. She had to prepare his food and wash his clothes. She never made his bed, for he did not have one. He still slept on the kitchen floor with a few blankets either underneath or on top of him.

The births of the six Peters and three girl babies had been nine shocking events for Miss Hummer. The fact that the mothers of the six boys had husbands did not

lessen their sins in her estimation. She had reached the conclusion that the begetting of children was a wicked practice that only furnished proof of bawdy body relations. Life made up of

such walking and talking proofs of sin was necessarily foul, vile, and wicked.

Others should follow her example, she maintained, and put an end to childbearing and the life that it perpetuated. In adopting a child she had not begot one. Henrietta was proof of some one else's sin. And in bringing him up in her reformed way she was preventing his engendering children.

Everyone, she told herself, is unfortunate in having had to be born as a result of some one else's misdemeanor. We should see to it that this transgression is not duplicated and this stigma of life passed on to someone else. Miss Hummer would not have approved of contraceptives. What she advocated was castration. She would have campaigned in favor of a twentieth amendment for the prohibition of testicles.

Miss Hummer had never heard of Sadism as such. She would have justified the practice of this sexual perversion by maintaining that people, being live proofs of sin, should be punished. And that men, being members of the male coalition, deserved far more punishment than women, their victims. Pleasure attending the chastising of a man was only the just reward of the one who gave this criminal his due.

Miss Hummer did not understand how other people could be so wicked. Their carnal propagation and immoral consumption of alcoholic drinks were fiendish atrocities. Their foul minds were filthier than offal. And if an inhabitant of some other world

should make a visit he would assume her to be of the same habits as the rest.

Henrietta's birthday was celebrated by his foster mother each year. This was the day that marked the horrible sin of his nativity and called for appropriate observance. He was whipped as soon as Miss Hummer awoke and then locked in a small closet for the rest of the day without food. Miss Hummer arose early on the morning that Henrietta reached his thirteenth birthday. This was an occasion for special ceremony. Henrietta was to be graduated to the next to last pile of sticks in the series. She awoke him with a thrust of her foot and examined the new pile of scourges with sparkling eyes.

She had replaced the original sticks of the size in this pile with green wood of a new supply purchased from David Hume. These would make Henrietta moan with new tones of pain. This wicked man in her power would not have such an easy life from now on. There was an extra satisfaction in knowing that Henrietta had brought

this wood into the kitchen himself. Miss Hummer had tossed and turned most of the night in happy anticipation of this birthday revel.

She selected a piece of wood with careful deliberation. Drunk with lust and grinning with glee, she staggered toward Henrietta. Miss Hummer started to raise her arm. This movement was checked abruptly. A rheumatic cramp sent the arm back to her

side. She put the stick in her other hand and felt another pang of pain when she tried to raise it.

Neither arm could be lifted high enough to give Henrietta more than a gentle pat. She hit him a few light strokes with the stick, but the pain was too great for her to continue. What incredible injustice that her rheumatism should interfere with an event such as this.

Disappointed and chagrined, she kicked Henrietta with her foot until he cried. She dropped the stick onto his back and went to find her rheumatism salve. This criminal was having his punishment postponed, while she, his jailer, was being made to suffer. But she would make up for this probation as soon as one of her arms was well.

Henrietta picked up the stick. He saw red and black marks on a piece of bark that still clung to it. This must be part of his friend the tree. Henrietta mumbled to it.

“It was too bad you had to be a tree,” he tried to say. “I was certainly lucky to be a child.”

CHAPTER XLVIII

FELIX DOLE'S DREAM

ALICE GOODE had long since given up hope that Felix Dole would ever provide anything but spiritual companionship. She had hoped that the birth of her baby would inspire him to more physical and satisfying methods of approach, but no. Felix had never been able to acquire the courage in Alice's presence that he had in his dreams. The proof that she had the same courage whether asleep or awake only made him more nervous.

He still called on her. They took walks together. Arthur Moore had started a story most people believed that Felix was the father of her child. But their only bodily contacts came when Alice held her hand in his, while he kept it at arm's length. Felix seldom talked to her. Alice wondered why she bothered going to walk with him. Felix wondered why he could not have his bashfulness in his dreams and his gallantry when with Alice.

Alice and her mother had lived very chaste lives since Arthur Moore noticed the first signs of gestation in the family. Mrs. Goode's opinion — that since Alice had made a mutual lover of Arthur, and been responsible for frightening him away, she should now be entitled to share Felix with Alice was — expressed

to her daughter while stumbling home together from the town hall one Saturday night. Her daughter was willing to make this sacrifice and even offered to ask Felix to call for Emma and her on alternate nights.

This proposal pleased Mrs. Goode. Felix did not dare refuse to ask her to walk with him after Alice suggested that he do so. Emma and Felix went out together one night. They did not get home until late, and Mrs. Goode did not rise until noon the next day. Alice suspected that her mother had had more success than she, and felt a little jealous.

Mrs. Goode seemed to awake with difficulty. "I'm lame all over," she groaned. "All he did was walk. We must have gone fifty miles."

On many Saturday nights Alice and Felix had found themselves together on the way home from their respective drinking gatherings. Alice always stopped to rest in front of the deserted Goodwin farm. Felix always waited for her to recover her energy. Once when she stopped there Alice found that she was with Alfred Dole instead of his son.

"Sorry," he said, "but I think that's my wife comin' right behind us."

But on one Saturday night Felix Dole found himself walking in his sleep. Inspired by the advice of his drinking glass in reaction to a new brand of bootleg liquor at Lem Witherbee's, he deliberately sought Alice among the wabbling women who came from the town hall. He took her by the arm with a firm grasp and led her away from the group in a surprising manner. Alice squinted and blinked.

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"Is that you, Felix?" she asked in astonishment.

"Yup. Less get away from this crowd where we can be alone."

"But why?" asked Alice, stumbling as he caused her to quicken her pace. She could think of no good reason for being alone with Felix.

"You'll see," he said. ""Wonderful liquor at Lem's tonight. Less hurry. I hope you feel as good as I do, sweetheart."

Alice looked at her companion. No-one had ever called her "sweetheart" before. And, of all people, Felix had shown the least inclination to do so.

Felix tripped in his haste and would have fallen down but for his grip on Alice's arm. When they reached the Goodwin farm they were almost running. Alice did not have a chance to stop outside. Felix led her on up the path and through the front door.

They could not see anything in the darkness, but Felix soon knew where all the principal parts of Alice's anatomy were. He kissed her a few times, too. Alice expected to wake up any minute, but she kissed him and hugged him tightly on the chance that this might not be a dream.

Felix pulled her onto the floor beside him. The boards of the old house creaked. Alice realized that hay was much softer, but, having Felix in this transformed state, she could not complain about the spot chosen. Being in more of a dream than a state of consciousness, Felix acted accordingly. At last he had realized his ambition to be able to go to sleep in Alice's presence. Alice decided she must be awake

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but could not believe this was Felix. For the time being, she did not care who it was.

Felix did not awake as usual when his dream came to a climax. Having discovered that he was not afraid to make love to Alice, he summoned still more courage and asked her a question.

"Will you marry me?" he inquired. Convinced now that he would dare go to bed with her in the event of a wedding ceremony, it was safe to propose.

Alice had not thought of marriage. She was not thinking of anything very definite at the moment. The proposal brought her back to reality with an unpleasant jolt. Marriage would mean a lot more housework than she had to do now, but it would also be a means to a permanent lover.

"Whya, I guess so," she replied skeptically.

“That’s fine,” said Felix. “Y’ didn’t bring a drink with you, did y’?”

“No.” Alice kissed Felix and led him by the hand to the door. He was staggering more than before he had come in and seemed in no mood for further attempts at running.

“I’ll take you home instead of you takin’ me home,” Alice offered.

Felix did not reply. She held him by the arm and accompanied him to his back door. She kissed him and headed toward her house. Felix fumbled for the knob on the wrong side of the door and then slumped into a heap on the porch.

The next morning Felix awoke when his sister, Mary Dole, opened the kitchen door and tripped

over him. His head throbbed painfully, and his stomach felt like a slowly rising elevator. He had no memory of events after dark on the night before. There was some trace in his mind of a dream about Alice Goode, but he dismissed this with the usual jealous indignation that his waking self felt for his courage when dreaming. The only thought he formed clearly was, “How soon will I die?”

That afternoon Alice Goode came to the Dole farm. Felix was sitting in a chair leaning against the barn. He felt very little like having a visitor and hoped she would not see him.

But Alice walked up to him. She greeted him with a kiss and casually asked, “What day shall we get married?”

Felix wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and spat. It was very poor humor for Alice to torment him like this because he did not dare make love to her. In suggesting that they get married, she was thinking how funny he would look sleeping on the floor. He felt a hatred for Alice and wished he had never seen her.

“Go to hell!” he said, and walked toward the road for Lem Witherbee’s store.

Nine months later Alice Goode had another baby. She told Felix Dole that he was its father, but he did not even laugh. Alice’s humor when directed against him was very depressing. He was not mentioned among the possible fathers in the discussions based around the new infant at Lem Witherbee’s, despite the fact that it was named Felix.

CHAPTER XLIX

MINNIE BECOMES ADEPT AT HIDE AND GO SEEK

WHEN her child was a baby Minnie Muller sometimes sat holding it in her arms at her old post on the town hall steps. This site held many pleasant memories. These were not duplicated with regularity until she was able to leave Elsie to play by herself, but when two men came by together they arranged to take turns holding the baby. Minnie abandoned this station after Elsie learned to walk efficiently. The child established annoying practices of following its mother when she tried to seek privacy, and of finding Minnie after she had eluded it.

Mrs. Whiter, who continued her duties as watch-woman over the town hall cider kegs, would have taken the child in charge if requested. Minnie had a secret fear that, knowing little of the habits of children, she would entertain it with cider. Minnie did not like the thought of being greeted on her return by Elsie staggering and stuttering in a drunken condition.

Children generally acted as though in a somewhat drunken condition, even though they did not drink intoxicating liquor as a rule. She thought that their bodies, being in a stage of development, might not have acquired the faculties necessary to become sober

again after drinking. A child, already drunk by nature, would be a difficult problem if it became drunk with alcohol as well and was unable to do anything to check its effects. Then, too, when it finally sobered up in later years it would probably find life rather dull.

Minnie Muller retained her popularity with Menham men even though she deserted the original meeting place. Only the few of her followers who had legitimate claims to membership in the old school objected to calling for her at her home. But all men received the same reception if Mrs. Nancy Muller saw them first.

“Mrs. Black is not home,” she would shout. “Go on away. Get out of here.”

These cries would be heard by Minnie if she was there. She would make her presence known by calling from a window, “I’ll be out in just a minute. Wait for me down the road.”

She made this announcement once when a man whom she did not see called to sell bear oil that would cure all ailments and prolong life. When Minnie caught up with him, she was embarrassed by finding him to be a stranger. But she soon learned that she had not acted with impropriety. This was another lover whose body was built to match hers.

The Goodwin farm became the established year-round meeting place where Minnie saw her callers after they were driven away by her mother. A bolt was applied to the inside of the door there and the

windows boarded so that Elsie could not gain admittance while trying to find her mother.

Minnie did not start from her house until the man who called was out of sight. Then she left in haste to join him, and both her mother and Elsie thought she was playing hide and go seek. Elsie began the hunt after merrily counting to one hundred. This head start enabled the couple to reach their retreat before being overtaken. Minnie would jump out in front of Elsie from behind a tree or other hiding spot on the way home.

The fame and distinction acquired by Minnie Muller had gone far beyond the imagination of John Lyman when he selected her as a prodigy, in every respect but two: her child had not been twins, and she had only been a mother once. These facts were the only arguments of the old school members in attempting to maintain their equality with the new school in being the exploiters of Mrs. Nancy Muller.

Both girls, they pointed out, had only had one child, and so Minnie had no claims to superiority over her mother. But even if Minnie should be conceded to be superior, this was because she was the product of the old school.

These arguments held little weight, for the new school members outnumbered those of the old and could win any point at issue through their greater volume. They insisted that Minnie had had but one child only because she was the daughter of the old school. She had not been endowed by these impotent

fathers with sufficient fertility to produce another offspring.

Minnie, they asserted, had been active over a much longer period than her mother. Her methods were far superior and her obligingness and cooperation much better. She had won many more lovers than her mother. And the stories built around Minnie not only included all those told by the old school about Nancy, but new ones that far exceeded these both in number and excellence and that were constantly being added to.

The two schools of expression at Lem Witherbee’s had become separate units. The old school assembled in one end of the store for its discussions of Nancy, while the new school exchanged anecdotes about Minnie. Lem Witherbee, an old school member, had to desert the ranks in order to keep the glasses of the new school members filled. An interchange of thought at the close of discourses on these topics on Saturday nights came in boisterous debates in which the old school had to admit defeat by suggesting the next subject for consideration.

Minnie Muller was glad she had never married. Having so many natural husbands, it would have been unfair for her to wed any one of them to the exclusion of the others. If Paul Turner had proposed in the days before she had learned of her additional lovers, she would probably have agreed to the ceremony, and these other men, with equal claims to her, would have been neglected.

Wedlock she considered as having been conceived

on the theory that each woman has but one man patterned after the mold of her body, and each man is built according to only one woman. When a properly mated pair find each other it is fitting that they should celebrate with a wedding or other appropriate observance. She had invited Paul Turner to her house for dinner.

Her case was an unusual one that did not fit into the scheme of marriage. Having a unique body that was adapted to several men, she was not restricted to only one. Polyandry was not recognized in the marriage regulations, so she could not get married without being unfaithful to all but one of her mates. She hoped her daughter would prove to be equally fortunate.

Minnie Muller often laughed at the thought of how envious other women would be if having more than one husband were permitted, and she wore the wedding rings of all her lovers.

“I wouldn’t need to wear gloves,” she grinned, looking at her bare hands.

CHAPTER L

A WHITE MARE NIGHTMARE

A MAN with black glasses, hat, suit, and tie drove slowly into Menham, in a small truck. He stopped in front of the store and walked to the door. When his pushes failed to open this entrance, he sat down on the steps and brought a large bottle of hair tonic from a pocket. Other pockets showed bulges similar to the one that this action had leveled. He lifted the bottle to his mouth and took several swallows. He continued to sit there, quietly staring in front of him except when of necessity looking at the sky in order to drink again from the bottle.

Lem Witherbee did not recognize the visitor at first and became frightened. This might be another policeman with a truckload of axes and improved means of destruction. He watched the man through the knot hole. The brand of liquor he had with him was not known to the storekeeper. It was probably some high-priced cordial he had saved out for himself in destroying the last saloon visited.

Then the man started to talk.

"I've told you I don't need a horse, especially a white horse, now that I've got this truck," he said. "Run along. Stop following me around. If I ever did get a horse it wouldn't be a white one anyway.

Get away! I know you can dance, but I don't want you. There's some nice grass in that field. Go have some breakfast and do your dancing over there."

Lem Witherbee recognized this voice. He had heard it say, "White Horse," before. This was Deacon Ira Ormsby. Lem opened the door to let the customer in before he could drink any more of his own stock. The deacon hurried to shelter and slammed the door.

"I'm glad you've got some locks inside," he said, sliding a bolt and snapping a padlock into place. "I guess they'll keep that white mare away from me for a while. I got an automobile just to show the horse I didn't want her, but she still keeps followin' me around."

Deacon Ormsby sat down in the end of the room opposite from the door and took a drink from his bottle of hair tonic with considerable relief.

"Hey, I still keep whisky here," shouted Lem, indignant that he should lose still another sale.

"Glad to hear it," said the deacon. "That's what I came to see you about. I've got a few cases of the real stuff I can let you have real cheap."

Deacon Ira Ormsby had a new schedule now. Instead of alternately buying his liquor in one town and preaching against whisky in the next, he sold bootleg liquor, spoke for prohibition enforcement, and drank hair tonic in all towns.

While his merchandise was genuine bootleg whisky, the deacon preferred hair tonic for his personal consumption. He could not put a bottle of moonshine

to his lips with the same confidence as one containing a mixture of kerosene and alcohol for the hair. His favorite brand was always of the same flavor with a uniform base of reliable grain alcohol. It was not as good as the whisky he used to denounce, but he knew how each drink would taste and react on his system. He also knew it was not poisonous.

But Deacon Ormsby did not admit these facts even to himself. He still had explanations to cover any situation in which he was found that seemed to be inconsistent with the views of his lectures:

His humanitarian mission of drinking the venomous pre-prohibition whisky so that it could not contaminate and corrupt others had given way to a still more worthy cause. Hair tonic had become a beverage, bringing massacre and havoc with even worse devastation than moonshine. He was consuming this deadly hair tonic so that others could not have it. The kind and benevolent Lord was keeping him alive to drink this awful poison that would be fatal to another.

Those who escaped as a result of his sacrifice and still insisted on violating the laws of temperance would have to choose the lesser of two evils. They would have to drink bootleg liquor, which, foul and bad as it was, would not kill or corrupt them so quickly. He was keeping these depraved sinners out of the fires of Hell just so much longer.

In keeping with this work, he was selling bootleg liquor — and at a loss, he insisted — so that the poor unfortunates who drank might have access to this

rather than hair tonic. Moonshine was poison, liquid corruption, and a quick road to Hell, but it could not quite equal the agonizing death torments of hair tonic, death torments which he suffered constantly, kept alive by our munificent and gracious Saviour.

Lem Witherbee was in no mood for buying liquor from a man to whom he had expected to sell a day's supply. His moonshine was delivered regularly by a Scofield bootlegger, whose labels read, "Fresh And Pure Rye Whisky. Wash And Return All Bottles."

"I'm sellin' whisky, not buyin' it, Lem told the deacon emphatically. "And if you want to drink here you'll have to drink mine."

Deacon Ormsby did not want to leave this retreat and face the white horse that he knew was smiling and waiting for him outside. In an outraged manner, he told Lem that he did not drink whisky, and offered him a dollar to let him stay in the corner where he was and take his medicine.

"Medicine to save living souls from Hell," he would have added if Lem had asked for details.

The deacon did not leave the store until evening. He had announced to all of Lem Witherbee's customers during the day that he would conduct an open air temperance rally in front of the town hall that night. Lem approved of the gathering. It would be a means of getting the men congregated for a mid-week meeting at his store. The deacon drove his truck to the hall, following a course that would have won the affection of a giant serpent.

Mrs. Whiter had been waiting for him. The rest

had not arrived. Deacon Ormsby began his lecture at once, despite the small audience.

"We must keep our nation alive by enforcing prohibition by ridding our land of the plague of liquor that is singeing its innocent souls with Hell fire," he declaimed. "We must free poor, unfortunate addicts from the tenacles of moonshine. We must __"

The deacon paused. He saw a white horse standing in the doorway. Then he recalled that this was the place he had first met this mare that had either followed or led the way over his routes ever since. The horse was home again now. Perhaps he could elude it while it was renewing old acquaintances.

"Deacon Ormsby, won't you come in for a glass of cider?" Mrs. Whiter asked.

The deacon did not answer. He started his machine and rolled away as quickly as possible. This was a wonderful opportunity to escape his unwelcome companion who tried to entertain him with its antics. The horse would be obliged to accept the hospitality of its former friends, and he could be far away by the time it was able to start the pursuit.

Deacon Ormsby's smile suddenly went awry. He saw the white mare trotting alongside the truck and displaying a gold band on its left front ankle. He looked to the other side and saw a black horse running in step with the white one. It was sprinkled with confetti and wore a large silk hat. The black horse was a stallion. The road had become unusually bumpy. The deacon discovered that he was driving across an open field.

CHAPTER LI

A CLAMOROUS HEADLINE

FOR a long time Arthur Moore had been tired of May Cline. He had gone with her longer than any other girl, and had been tired of her longer than any other. He attributed this satiety to the inadequacy of May, in common with all women, in her ability to interest a man for long.

Moore felt ashamed of his relations with May. He had given her grounds for the thought that she had dominated him and been an essential figure in his life over this long period. Such degeneracy on his part had not only been degradation for him but disloyalty to the male sex.

A woman, he contended, is made to be but one of several mates for some man. Each man, with his superior abilities and powers, is intended to have a number of women at his disposal, and it should be considered a supreme achievement for a woman, at some time in her life, to be one of those on call for some man.

While he had told May of other women with whom he shared his attentions, she must have realized that they were largely fictitious. In allowing her to be the only woman, he had provided her with contentions for vanity and a feeling of superiority. She

could assume that she was the equal of him and of all men. As his only girl, she could maintain that she dominated him in being the only one to provide an essential bodily function. She could consider herself capable of dominating any other man in the same way.

Women had had a declining interest for Arthur Moore during the past few years. He had seen May Cline less and less frequently. After each visit he insisted vehemently that he had taken his last walk with a girl, and so no plans were laid for obtaining a different woman for future usage.

Later, like a recurring illness, he would feel the need of a woman again. Surely this would be the last time. It would be easier and quicker to call on May just once more than to go to the bother of soliciting the attentions of another woman. And so the affair continued.

Moore tried to convince May that she was not a dominant or even an important individual in his life. He generally twisted her arm, slapped her face, or squeezed her breasts in a painful manner before departing. Once she had had a dark blue border under one eye when she arrived home. On other occasions there had been similar marks on other parts of her body. Moore considered these past proofs of his

superiority feeble and unconvincing, for he had always gone back to May at some future time, which gave the impression he could not get along without her.

The recurring biological urge had returned to

Arthur Moore and become greater than his contempt for this woman whom he had allowed to elevate herself in imagination into the ascendancy of the male. He would have to call on May Cline this one last time and take another step downward in his dishonor. After this final visit he would show her that she could not even affect the mechanism of his memory, to say nothing of his life.

He decided to go to Lem Witherbee's store first. A few drinks from and words with his whisky glass would enable him to invoke this defilement with a less reproachful feeling of shame.

"At any rate, May Cline is only *your* girl," his glass told him. "She doesn't think all the men in town have to have her, like Minnie Muller."

When Arthur Moore left the store he had a better opinion of May. He hoped that this might not be his last walk with her. He was not too old to go with women regularly. He would get another girl, too, and let May see him with her. He could tell her he had been going with this new girl and others all along.

This would drop May, out which her imagination had lifted her, back to ranks of women. The higher she had risen, further she would fall, and the harder she would land. These thoughts made the approaching meeting with May seem very desirable. It would boost her to a point just so much higher for her fall.

Henrietta Hummer had been sitting on the store steps. He interrupted Moore's reverie with a deluge

of powder that descended on his shoulders and back. Arthur was enraged by the affront to his masculine dignity and jerked an arm into the air to hit the offender. The arm returned slowly to his side. He felt as though he had just discovered something: Henrietta was a girl, young, but still a girl.

There was something lawless and freakish about the way Henrietta's face was painted, something attractive. Unsymmetric red and black patterns on his cheeks and forehead, together with a black nose and red chin, gave the impression of a courtesan savage out of the past come in modern dress to test her wiles on modern man.

This girl was at his disposal as well as May Cline. When he was a boy he had played house with girls as young as this and provided imaginary bedrooms for actual indulgences in the manner of a father and mother. It was strange he had never thought of Henrietta before.

Without comment, Arthur Moore took Henrietta roughly by the hand and started down the road toward his house. It was a new and pleasant experience for Henrietta

to have some one walk hand in hand with him. He ran every few steps to keep up with Moore's longer strides. He was delighted by this novelty and joyfully uttered, "Slut."

"Yup, you're big enough to be a slut now," replied Moore.

Moore walked slowly past the Cline farm. He wanted May to observe that she was of no more importance to him and could do nothing more for him

than this little idiot girl. Such a realization should topple her from her usurped pinnacle.

Arriving at his farm, Moore led the way into the barn. A rustling sound gave the effect of a large rat running for hiding in the hay.

"There's a lot of other girls that would like to be in your place right now," said Moore, boosting Henrietta up the ladder into the hayloft. He was not going to take any risk of letting this brainless girl think he was obliged to choose her. Being a fool, she might assume he had devoted his life to chastity while waiting for her to be born and grow up.

"I'm doin' you a big favor," he added.

The six Peters arrived at top speed at Lem Witherbee's. When Lem opened the door he was greeted with an astounding announcement that was too sensational and important to be suppressed.

"Henrietta Hummer is a *boy!"* they shrieked.

The six Peters ran on to spread the information, while Lem shouted after them excitedly for details.

CHAPTER LII

MOORE'S SECOND INSPIRATION COMES TOO LATE

ARTHUR MOORE took Henrietta gently by the by hand and started down the road toward the store. He walked much slower than before, making far more allowance than necessary for the boy's limp. He watched Henrietta's face with an expression of pain and wondered again why he had not thought to bring the child to his farm before. Henrietta would have preferred adjusting his steps to Moore's longer ones as he had on the way out to the farm. This new pace was too monotonous.

Feelings of bitter hatred and of maddening sympathy whirled about in Moore's mind and overflowed into his body. He felt both stimulated and stunned. Miss Hummer, a woman, had actually made a man inferior to her own sex. She had not only brought him down to the level of women but had pushed him still lower.

She had succeeded in disguising him as a human privy, an offal receptacle of her own kind. The disgrace and humiliation had been so great for this boy, being overpowered by a woman and forced to appear as a girl, that he had been driven out of his senses. A woman had made a man into what had appeared to be an idiot-woman.

These thoughts and others like them almost brought tears from Arthur Moore. The male sex had been ridiculed by a woman. It had been degraded and defamed much more than by his own activities in letting one woman think she dominated him or in those of other men in letting Minnie Muller assume she was so important to all of them.

Miss Hummer had made a man into a woman, an idiot, and had even crippled his body with this limp. Moore's imagination could go no further. It could not have gone as far as this without actual, tangible proof. Moore felt as though he had awaked in a horrible dream and that reality had disappeared instead of the fantasy.

During all these years Miss Hummer, no doubt, had gloried in the thought that she was the equal, perhaps even the superior, of men. She was able to take a boy baby and distort and deform him into a limping girl, not only that but a fool. With her head in the air, and her prim and haughty manner, Miss Hummer had been laughing at men all the while, expressing contempt for their authority. Perhaps she had let other women know her secret, that Henrietta was a man. Perhaps all the women in Menham were laughing. Shooting or hanging was too good for Miss Hummer. She had committed a new crime that called for a new extreme of punishment.

Other passions were crowded out of Arthur Moore's mind and body. He did not notice May Cline wave from her yard as he passed. If he had

seen her he would have sworn and probably thrown a rock instead of waving.

Moore's pity for Henrietta was an intense sensation arousing delicate brain parts that had almost atrophied during his lifetime. This boy, the superior of every woman, had found himself the imprisoned slave of one of them. He had been tortured into idiocy by the degeneracy into which she had sent him. She had given him a girl's name, made him wear dresses and petticoats and let his hair grow long.

Being able to change his garb and name now that his sex had been discovered, Henrietta could assert himself as the superior of women, but he would still be inferior to other men. He would still have to go through life bearing a stigma inflicted upon him by a woman.

Arthur Moore stopped at the store to obtain the advice of his whisky glass. Not even on the night of his marriage to Jenny Taylor had he felt the need of such counsel so greatly. Lem Witherbee stared at Henrietta as though he were a new kind of animal.

"Is she really a boy?" he asked.

"Yes!" shouted Moore. "That damned Miss Hummer thought she could fool us forever! Give him some candy, and get me some whisky."

Moore led Henrietta to a chair. Such attention was unprecedented. The boy expected some new kind of pain to follow and felt frightened. After Witherbee opened a small box of candy for him Henrietta experienced a new sensation of pleasure. He had never had candy before. He ate piece after

piece until the box was empty. Moore had been watching every move.

"Give him a bigger box," he said.

Half of the sky was a blinding red when Arthur Moore left the store. It had taken his whisky glass a long time to reach any conclusion, but its recommendation had finally come like a divine inspiration. He was glad he had not left sooner.

"Keep Henrietta here till I get back," he said to the storekeeper. Lem unfastened the bolt, which seemed to elude Arthur's fingers.

Moore walked toward Miss Hummer's house. He walked slowly, but not because this was his wish. His feet seemed uncertain where the next step would take them. Actually he was in a hurry. He was fulfilling his duty to avenge the tremendous insult to his sex inflicted by a woman. To kill her in an ordinary way would not be enough. His whisky glass had furnished the solution for this problem of an appropriate death.

Miss Hummer saw him staggering toward her door and was afraid. She was not frightened because he was drunk. All men were always drunk. A member of the male coalition was on her property. He must be intent on some wicked purpose: rape, arson, murder. This was the snake returned in its real form. The snakes she had seen before were probably Arthur Moore in disguise. The male conspiracy was declaring war again. She had been the victor in the past war, but the enemy must have new and more deadly tactics to be attacking her so openly.

At first Miss Hummer determined not to answer the knock on the door. Then she realized that Moore could break his way through. She could lock out the snake but not a man. She opened the door. Moore was leaning against the side of the house for support. Miss Hummer saw that he had already been in position to smash down the wall.

"Henrietta's hurt herself over to my place," he said politely. "You better come over and get her."

Miss Hummer started to say, "You tend to your affairs, and I'll tend to mine," but checked herself. She would have to profess a more kindly interest in her child. And she would have to get him away from Moore before his real sex was discovered. Evidently Moore had not found out that Henrietta was a boy. He had referred to him as "her".

The six Peters had not visited Miss Hummer in making their rounds.

"That's too bad," said Miss Hummer. "I'll come right over."

This mission of the male society seemed peaceful. Perhaps she was not in unusual danger. Of course, going with a man to his farm was a precarious undertaking that no respectable woman would be a party to, but she would have to show herself willing to make this sacrifice to decency in the interests of Henrietta. She would have to allow herself to be contaminated by the companionship of a man during this walk.

Miss Hummer's worries were dismissed entirely for the moment when an amusing thought came to

her: probably Moore had injured Henrietta, assuming him to be a girl. Her smile soon vanished. Perhaps Moore would injure her in the same way.

He suggested that they take a short cut across the Hume meadow. Miss Hummer reluctantly agreed. She supposed it was necessary to show her desire to get to Henrietta as soon as possible. Thoughts of possible hideous crimes this man might perpetrate on her person while out of sight of habitation made her shudder. But then, if she refused to go by this lonely route he might force her to accompany him, perhaps drag her by the hair.

There was one consolation: she probably would not be seen in the company of a man. This would be a protection for her honor unless Moore told others she had walked with him.

The pair walked slowly and silently, Miss Hummer keeping as far behind Moore as she dared. She hoped Henrietta was not hurt badly enough to delay for long the revenge she anticipated in return for this risk she was being forced to take with her chastity on his account. Moore staggered considerably and tripped over many rocks and humps of earth. The path led to the rear of Moore's barn. He walked to a large, oblong box that provided an annex to this building.

"Henrietta fell through the floor of the barn," said Moore. "We can get to her this way best. Give me a hand with this door, will you please."

Arthur Moore and Miss Hummer raised the hinged cover from the rattlesnake sty. Moore leaned it

against the side of the barn. Miss Hummer found herself staring at a tangle of snakes. The whole male army was assembled to meet her. Electric shocks shot through her. She felt numbed to all feelings but terror and pain. She was helpless. She knew she could not run or even move. She heard sounds that she thought were her death rattle.

Moore stepped behind her. He placed his hands on her shoulders and pushed with all his strength. Miss Hummer fell through wire netting and struck headfirst amidst the snakes. Several pairs of fangs were buried in her body. What was even worse for her comfort, several snakes crawled over her and squirmed out from beneath her. She prayed for death, but her body refused to lose consciousness.

"Poor women; God is a man," she muttered incoherently.

Arthur Moore was elated. He reached into the pen to exchange embraces with one of the snakes. He leaned too far and lost his balance. He fell, landing on top of Miss Hummer.

Either the snakes did not recognize him in this horizontal position, or they failed to distinguish his features in the twilight. Three of them sprang at him with open mouths. A fourth joined them but missed its aim and sunk its teeth in Miss Hummer.

"You dirty, stinking bitch," groaned Moore, as though Miss Hummer, and not the snakes, had bitten him with venomous fangs. "I should have thrown you down the backhouse seat and nailed the cover on."

CHAPTER LIII

A COFFIN FOR TWO

NEWS of the deaths of Arthur Moore and Miss Hummer was announced before their hearts stopped beating by the six Peters. They galloped triumphantly from house to house with the new bulletin and broke their speed record established that day in proclaiming Henrietta Hummer's masculinity. Mrs. Nancy Muller had not heard either account but was one of the first to arrive at Arthur Moore's farm the next morning.

Because of the rattlers and the darkness that had fallen and blended with the murk that came to Moore and Miss Hummer, no-one went to the scene that night. Nobody went very close to the snake sty in the morning.

Only a few of the snakes had escaped from their pen. The rest were happily catching flies and sunning themselves in interwoven groups occupying perches on top of the two bodies. Mrs. Muller looked at this scene from a distance.

"Humm!" she muttered to nobody in particular. "So Moore was the father of her baby. Well, they picked a poor place for their last get-together."

Others made mental notes of these conclusions for future reference but were concerned for the time being

with a matter that did not seem so obvious. How were they going to get the corpses away from the rattlers without being bitten themselves?

There's no reason why we should take any chances just to get them out of there," said John Lyman. "What good will it do to risk our lives? You can't save the life of a dead person."

"And they're certainly dead by now," commented David Hume.

"We don't want to let them snakes get out and come visitin' us neither," said Andrew Cline.

"No," said his daughter, May. The visits of rattlesnakes could not compensate for the visits of Arthur Moore.

One of the snakes seized a mouse from somewhere and held it in its mouth.

"That must be either Moore or Miss Hummer he's eatin'," said Mrs. Sadie Sadler.

"Looks more like Arthur sprawled there across Miss Hummer to me," replied Alfred Dole.

The six Peters were not in hiding at this gathering. They were officially present and a center of attraction second only to the contents of the snake sty. Everybody wanted to know everything about the catastrophe. The boys continued to provide

details after they ran out of facts. They enjoyed being public figures and wanted to continue in this capacity as long as possible. They remained together so that their accounts would coincide in essential points.

"Moore took off her dress and said he was goin' to take her under the barn," narrated Peter Dean.

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"And her petticoats — he took them off," added Peter Jones.

"How many did she have on?" asked Mrs. Goode.

"Er, six," said Peter Sadler.

"No, ten," corrected Peter Pike.

"How did she get her clothes back on?" asked Mrs. Cline.

"Well, when she saw the snakes, she grabbed her clothes and dressed," replied Peter Pike. "She didn't dare run without havin' them on."

"And the snakes jumped out and pulled her in with them," added Peter Lyman.

"And they didn't like the taste of her, so they grabbed Moore," said Peter Jones.

"I thought you said Moore pushed her in," said Mrs. Jones.

"No, he jumped in to save her, ' said Peter Hatch.

"You just said the snakes pulled him in," insisted Paul Turner.

"Well, they helped him in," explained Peter Dean.

These conflicting versions were furnishing material for many long discussions at both the town hall and Lem Witherbee's store. A concordant account that left no inconsistencies to justify personal opinions and arguments would not have been as satisfactory.

At length, becoming a little too involved, Peter Pike picked up a long pole and knocked down the cover of the snake sty with it. This changed the topic.

"There, we should of thought of that before," said John Lyman. "Now we can bury 'em, snakes and all, right here."

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"Yeah, and they've got a good big coffin in case they should want to turn over sometime," added David Hume.

Arthur Moore's horse and cart brought several loads of dirt to the rear of the barn. This was dumped and stamped down on the closed snake sty. The men cooperated in the burial. This was the best means of getting rid of the rattlesnakes.

There was still another problem to be settled. What was to become of Henrietta Hummer?

"He's too old to go back to the Scofield Orphanage and not crazy enough to go to a lunatic asylum," said Andrew Cline.

"He's been in my store all night," said Lem Witherbee. "I've had all I want of him."

Mrs. Whiter blushed and entered the conversation. “I thought p’raps I might adopt him,” she volunteered timidly. “I’ll change his name to Henry and change his clothes.”

A troubled look on Lem Witherbee’s face became one of pleasant surprise. He had not expected to get rid of Henrietta so easily.

“Let’s go get him now,” he said, anxious to permit as little time as possible to elapse in which Mrs. Whiter could change her mind.

They walked side by side toward the road, each intent on getting to the store as soon as possible.

“I’ll cut his hair and wash the rouge off his face,” said Mrs. Whiter happily.

She had a man.

THE END

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